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# Competing for the Motherland: Sports Spectacle and Nationalism During the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics

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**Competing for the Motherland:  
Sports Spectacle and Nationalism During the 2014 Sochi  
Winter Olympics**

Tara Law  
A Slavic Studies Honors Thesis

*Connecticut College // New London, Connecticut // May 2014*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Russian state guided the extended narration of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games, and hence the reproduction of the Russian nation in the months preceding the spectacle. The Sochi Olympics proffered a vision of Russian national identity before a global mass audience, but also to the Russian nation itself. The Olympics courted the gaze of the Russian national audience, drawing its attention to the accomplishments of individual Russians. The image of Russia constructed during the Games was of a robust, modern nation guided by a strong state under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin. Combining athletic and artistic elements, the Games worked to articulate a definition of what it is to be a member of the Russian nation. This spectacle was in turn framed by the Russian media, which is state controlled or faces intense pressure from the state. State control severely restricted and shaped dominant narratives of the events for audiences within the Russian Federation, enforcing belief in a state-designated narrative of identity and history.

## INTRODUCTION

During the 2014 Sochi Games, Russia created a specific image of its nation's legacy, drawing the eye of its national audience to its people's accomplishments and potential. The display constructed by the Olympic organizers showcased Russia's ability to compete globally, and to demonstrate that it has returned to a state of "normalcy" since the fall of the Soviet Union (Orttung & Makarychev 2013). During the Games' opening and closing ceremonies, Russia tallied its historical accomplishments, and thereby contextualized the Games within a legacy of success. Russian athletes became representatives not just of athletic achievement, but also of the national vision of the most talented Russian men and women. Ambitious Olympic venues, an elaborate cataloguing of cultural accomplishments during the opening and closing ceremonies, and athletes' accomplishments served to create an image of Russia's capabilities. In the name of creating an extraordinary display in honor of the nation, the orchestration of the Sochi Olympics led to the "temporary suspension of ordinary rules," including those rules ordinarily protected by Russian law (Makarychev 2013). Allowances were made for transgressions such as land expropriation, towing vehicles, and security measures, which, according to Andrey Makarychev "of course, vindicates the fact that Russia's restrictive domestic regulations deeply conflict with the dominant democratic standards and the very spirit of the Olympic movement" (2013). This suspension of rules and standards led some observers to the cynical conclusion that the Olympics are primarily about appearances: the state strives to present the ideal mask of itself to the world and, above all, to its own people. It is impossible to firmly establish the complete motivations of the Russian state, the Russian media, and the countless people who organized the Olympic Games;

nevertheless, an overarching message concerning Russian national identity emerged. The 2014 Sochi Olympic Games served as a testament to prove that Russia is strong, modern, and capably directed by the state. In an environment in which the media largely propagates official narratives, the state retains broad control over its citizens' access to, and thereby memory of, historic events, and thereby their understanding of themselves as members of a nation.

The Olympics afford states the opportunity to articulate particular visions of themselves and of the nations they claim to represent before a mass national and international audience. They allow states to define the nation on their own terms, acknowledging and honoring history while simultaneously restructuring the lens upon the nation's historical trajectory. In the contemporary era, the number of ways it is possible to view events has expanded immensely. The advent of television and the Internet have augmented the number of potential gateways of observation. However, much of this alleged open access to information is illusory; the typical ways of obtaining news within Russia are still closely monitored by the government and are manipulated by official channels. The majority of Russians continue to obtain their news via state-run television stations. The Russian media's predilection for supporting official doctrine has been advanced not only through overt censorship, but also through the cultivation of a culture of self-censorship. Memory of the public seizure of independent media organizations such as NTV reminds media organizations not to take their existence for granted.

Perhaps to a degree greater than in any other public spectacle, the Games concentrate both the international and domestic public's attention on a particular narrative of national identity. In many cases, as in Sochi, this image is directly controlled

by the state. The Olympic Games present a simplified, condensed vision of history, in which the nation struggles to achieve greatness before the rest of the world. Since the Olympics are constructed as a time to celebrate a particular nation, this effect is heightened for the state hosting the Games. Karin Book emphasizes that the Games' focus is always cultural legacy, which may be planned or unplanned, positive or negative, tangible or intangible: "The role of, and hope for, media coverage is probably one of the main reasons why cities, nations, or other geographical entities, choose to include mega-events into their place-marketing package" (Book 2013: 44). The Games would have no meaning without witnesses. The Olympics operate as the ultimate advertisement for a nation, allowing the state to control the narrative told about itself, its people, and its history. The events are also a way of marketing athletes as representatives of their nation, permitting sportsmen to accrue glory for the people they claim to represent. Their successes and failures are construed as contributing to the success and failures of their nations.

National identity does not exist as a cultural constant; it must be constructed and reconstructed on daily basis, and may be altered or manipulated to support the wishes of the state. Nationalism is a system of belief that claims to protect an imagined idea: that of the nation. As Benedict Anderson illustrates in his seminal work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, nationalism is rooted not in some "natural" process, but in societies' continuous expression and rehearsal of unspoken but mutually agreed upon markers of common identity. These markers are reinforced in the individual's daily experience by what might be considered otherwise unremarkable components of modern life, such as holidays, newspapers, schools, or workplaces.



According Michael Billig's *Banal Nationalism* (1995), nationalism becomes truly entrenched in a society when it becomes so infused with the practices of ordinary life it acquires a sense of inevitability. Billig argues that these practices "flag" national identity, reaffirming its existence without drawing attention to it.

The influence of "frames," or the phrasing and contextualizing that work to shape the narration of events, and which media organizations construct, is not restricted to the written page, but instead impacts their audience's conception of reality. The opening and closing ceremonies of the Sochi Games framed the Games within a state-approved version of Russian history and culture; the media, in turn, framed the Olympics while describing the events to their audiences. According to Robert Entman, the media telling of events constructs a self-reinforcing construction of reality for a mass audience. News reporting encourages a unified image of the world, mediated by journalists and received by the public. As a sport event, the Olympics are largely a soft news story; their most straightforward purpose, and the draw for such an enormous audience, is entertainment. At the same time, coverage of the Games works to create a certain vision of reality:

Media organizations construct social reality as they select and prioritize some items of information, omit or ignore others, weave accounts together, and build a "story" using particular types of exposition and articulating verbal discourse together to make a certain kind of sense (Waburn & Burke 1997: 670)

In other words, the media's way of describing events helps to shape society's collective memory.

The Olympics are philosophically justified by a system of "Olympic values," which were originally articulated by the father of the modern Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin. Coubertin firmly believed that the world is constructed of nations, but that this tendency needs to be constrained in order to promote cooperation. The goal of

“Olympism,” according to the Olympic Charter, “is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity” (2013). However, these factors serve to create an aura of positivity that can mask other intentions behind the Games. Alan Tomlinson and Christopher Young note that global sporting events offer unique opportunities to observe the rehearsal of global values:

Studying the sport spectacle in its form as a media event in its form as a media event is also to engage in a form of cultural history and the analysis of the persisting influence and power of ideas, that is, the use to which particular conceptions, values, and ideologies of sport, as well as the performing body, has been put (2006: 4).

Such an event articulates a particular vision of society.

This thesis will examine the expression of a state-approved vision of Russian national identity at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. One of the ways in which national identity is constructed is through sports. During the Olympics, a particular story of the Russian people was constructed. The following pages will attempt to assess the ways in which the Olympics are used to construct an image of the ideal Russian citizen as a defender of particular national norms and values, which is then filtered by the media and framed for an audience. Four topics will be discussed: sport and the creation of identity; national identity; the interconnection of sport, gender and nationalism; and sport and the media.

To sample the spectrum of Russian sports coverage, I analyzed three major sources: NTV, Sport.ru, and Novaya Gazeta. During this project, I collected materials pertinent to the Olympics in the days surrounding the Olympic events published on the home websites (sport.ru, ntv.ru, and novayagazeta.ru). Reading these texts online allowed

me to directly compare the otherwise dissimilar mediums. The newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* is certainly the most politically liberal of the three. It was founded in 1993 by a group of journalists who left the paper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* with the complaint that the organization was biased in favor of the Kremlin (Bigg 2013). Numerous challenges have threatened *Novaya Gazeta*'s existence through its twenty-year history, including financial setbacks, lawsuits, and crippling cyber attacks. Six of its journalists have been murdered, the largest number of any publication in a country considered to be among the world's most dangerous for journalists. The television channel NTV was formerly Russia's single independent news organization. On April 14, 2001, its employees came to work to find that they had been laid off. Vladimir Gusinsky, the founder of its holding company Media-Most, had been prosecuted for embezzlement. The gas giant Gazprom, in which the Russian state holds a majority stake, took control of the company. Sport.ru, meanwhile, is an online publication dedicated to sports. Its general director, Kirill Storchak, won in 2005 a "Glory of the Nation" award which Sport.ru reported was for his "11-year work aimed at the patriotic education of youth and the formation of national pride" (21 Sep. 2005). This thesis analyzes the Sochi Olympics through the lens constructed by these three media organizations.

## CHAPTER 1

### Promoting a National Narrative

The majority of substantial public events, from presidential inaugurations to natural disasters, take place within relatively limited terrain. Particularly within an extremely large country, such as Russia, the terrestrial distance between the location of a citizen's everyday life and the setting of news stories can be enormous. It is no coincidence, then, that the emergence of national identity coincided with the rise of mass media. As literacy and access to newspapers grew amongst ordinary citizens, they began to conceive themselves as part of an expansive, mass experience. States realized that they could utilize this newfound feeling to direct their citizens' feelings into loyalty toward the state apparatus. Emerging national identities were leveraged by the state and by groups of commonly identifying citizens, by calling upon the hearts and minds of citizens to draw unified support to various causes. National identity must become part of its members' daily experience; it must become so infused into their daily lives that it acquires a sense of naturalness and inevitability. During the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, the Russian state worked to channel national feeling toward itself, promoting a narrative of Russian history in which the state was the chief driver of national strength and progress.

#### 1.1 *What is Nationalism?*

A contradiction lies at the heart of nationalism; while it depends on its adherents' belief in its permanence and inevitability, nationalism primarily derives its strength from its followers' participation in believing. National identity, while imagined, continues to

serve as a framework for individuals to understand their larger location outside of their particular time and place. As Ernest Gellner states, “It is nationalism that engenders nations, and not the other way round” (2006: 54). Gellner's definition of nation has two contingencies: members of nations must have the same culture, and recognize each others' shared identity (Gellner 2006: 7). Theorists who study nationalism are divided into those who emphasize nationalism's historical basis, and those who argue that nationalism is entirely constructed. Those known as “Primordialists” work to “appeal to emotional and instinctive constraints as ultimate explanations for national mobilization. They typically date the origin of nationhood back to remote epochs, treating them as emotional givens” (Conversi 1988: 15). Ethnic nationalists, who believe that nationality is heredity, typically fall into this camp. Ethnosymbolism “focuses on the centrality of myths of descent in ethnic persistence” (Conversi 1990: 26). Alternatively, “Instrumentalists” are those who believe nationhood has no basis in reality, and are manipulated and constructed by “social engineers” (Hobsbawm 1990). However, Hobsbawm notes the governments most successful in building nations work with their people's preexisting sentiments (1990: 92). Although nationalism is constructed, it retains real emotional and socio-cultural influence.

Before discussing the idea of nationalism, it is important to distinguish it from the idea of state patriotism. The state may be incorporated into the idea of the nation, but the nation may exist independently of or even in opposition to the state. The state is the apparatus wielding authority over a specific region. Whereas the nation primarily exists in the imagination, the state is tangible. As defined by Max Weber, statehood requires a territory, a sovereign government, and a subject population (1997). To Weber, the state

has a “monopoly on legitimate violence.” Ernest Gellner claims the state “is that institution or set of institutions specifically concerned with the enforcement of order” (2006: 3). Gellner’s definition of the nation holds that the nation could not exist without the state, and he argues that states should directly represent the interests of particular nations. Nevertheless, the conceit inherent to the creation of a “nation-state” is exclusive rather than inclusive; its privileging members of the nation over those groups conceived as “others” will be discussed later in this paper. Loyalty to the state is often difficult to differentiate from loyalty to the nation, because the state often attempts to draw links between nationalist sentiments and state processes. Patriotism can be conceived in part as an exchange between the state and the citizen; the state receives support in return for maintaining security and order for its citizens:

Patriotic upbringing is defined as a systematic activity of *state* authorities and other organizations aiming at the development of patriotic consciousness, sense of loyalty to the Fatherland, willingness to fulfill one’s civic duty, and constitutional responsibilities to defend the interests of the homeland (Janmott and Piattoeva 2007: 544).

Although states may utilize nationalism to promote the state’s interests, nationalism does not exist solely between the citizen and the state, but on the cultural and interpersonal level of everyday life.

Cultivation of a common tongue, mass literacy, and the proliferation of newspapers helped to spread national identities beyond a minute elite. The idea of language passed down through the generations helps to establish a sense of the national continuity. Language could locate the nation’s members; “was the only thing that made them Germans or Italians” (Hobsbawm 1990: 103). The growing literacy of a middle class formed a community of people who had never met, but could recognize each other

as similar. Certain words, especially pronouns, continuously reestablish a previously ordained sense of shared identity: “our country,” “our state,” set squarely apart from “foreign” nations. The media allowed its consumers to recognize themselves within the context of an ongoing history. A newspaper, “is merely an ‘extreme form’ of the book, a book sold on a colossal scale, but of ephemeral popularity.... The arbitrariness of their inclusion and juxtaposition... shows that the linkage between them is imagined” (Anderson 2006: 33) While individual and private, the newspaper reading experience is also shared: “Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated...” (Anderson 2006: 35). A common reading experience links the masses to events and people they would otherwise never encounter.

Like a religion, nationalism is dependent on its followers’ continuous repetition of its traditions in order to maintain its existence. According to Michael Billig, ideally nationalism can achieve a sort of “banality,” a “common sense” of identity (2006). Repeated symbols of the nation, such as flags, holidays, or images, are incorporated into daily life. The need to reproduce nationalism does not fade when a nation is established: “Nationalism is still being reproduced: it can still call for ultimate sacrifices; and, daily, its symbols and assumptions are flagged” (Billig 1995: 8). Common culture or statehood, within themselves, do not necessitate a nation’s existence. Hobsbawm notes the number of communities which possess many of the common identifiers of nations far exceed the number of groups which declare themselves to be nations, concluding, “proto-nationalism alone is clearly not enough to form nationalities, nations, let alone states.”

English vocabulary does not adequately represent the Russian words to describe Russian national identity. In Russian, there are two words: *russkii* and *rossiyanin*, that can only be translated as *Russian* in English. *Russkii* refers to ethnic Russians, while *Rossiyanin* Russian citizens. Despite this differentiation, the division between these two translations of “Russian” is not always straightforward. Balancing ethnic and linguistic nationalist ties with loyalty to the state has been a problem for Russian rulers for generations. 20 million people who do not live within the state’s boundaries claim to be Russian, but many others live within Russia but are not seen by many as Russian (Laruelle 2009: 42). To reconcile the possession of an enormous and ethnically diverse territory with the ethnic-Russian national narrative, various Russian regimes have supported a narrative that combines an imperial narrative with the idea of an all-inclusive state. This version of the Russian national story is drawn together by the idea of Russian national greatness.

As previously discussed, the “truest” Russians were thought to be ordinary people, who lived in communion with the land and kept tradition close. This localized, pre-Industrial version of identity was incorporated into Russian national identity: “Nationalism constructs and transforms a ‘folk culture’ into high culture (creating a standard written vernacular, manufacturing national histories and traditions)” (Breuilly 2006: xxviii). The word *narod* translates to “the people,” but connotes the base of Russian national culture. This grassroots idea of Russianness, however, was connected to state power:

The holy Russian land is therefore defined by the holy icons, the faith, the Tsar, and the state. It is a powerful combination, and not only because icons, i.e. visible symbols such as flags, are still the most widely used methods of envisaging what



cannot be envisaged. And Holy Russia is unquestionably a popular, an unofficial force, not one created from above. (Hobsbawm 1990: 50).

The iconography and beliefs of Russia emanated from the people, but were infused with the idea of the overarching Russian state.

The idea of Russia's special destiny originated before the Revolution; Russia was believed to be the protector of both the true faith and the successor of Rome. To the great author Fyodor Dostoevsky, Russians were the "God-bearing people;" responsible for the one true faith and the world's salvation (Alekseev 2013: 15). Russia is the home of Orthodox Christianity, believed to be the truest expression of the Christian faith: "Salvation thus coincided with a physical boundary; it could only be attained in Russia" (Cherniavsky 1961: 107). Russia was not merely the protector of a particular religion, but of divine truth. The Russian nation's ability to survive is explained, in part, by its special spiritual destiny. Myths of Russia's national greatness were eventually dominated by secular imaginings of a powerful state. In prerevolutionary times, Nikolai Danilevskii argued that Russia represented the model nation: "In his view, the uniqueness of Russia consisted in the point that Russia alone possessed a healthy socioeconomic order, allowing its sustainability to be predicted" (Alekseev 2013: 14). Daniele Conversi notes that some authors have drawn a connection between the spread of secularism and nationalists' sense of "divine election" (1988: 20). This is particularly true of the Soviet State, which replaced a sense of Russia's divine destiny with the idea of a utopian Communist future. Today, Russia must contend with the loss of the Soviet national narrative. Marlène Laruelle notes a shift in public vocabulary during the 2000s; terms referring to Russia as a "Great Power" (*derzhavnost* or *velikoderzhavnost*'), use of the phrases for "statehood" (*gosudarstvennost*'), empire (*imperia*) or "preservation of the

nation” (*sberezhenie natsii*) and calls to the “motherland” (*rodina*) and “fatherland” (*otechestvo*) became commonplace, reflecting rising national confidence (2009: 25).

## 1.2 *Framing the Nation in History*

Establishment of a national identity and achievement of statehood are essential for any group that wishes to gain power in the contemporary geo-political community.

Although nationhood is conceived as based in an inevitable cultural and emotional legacy, claims of nationhood are associated with a push for recognition of a particular set of national interests: “The aura of nationhood always operates within the contexts of power” (Billig 1995: 4). According to Anderson, “The one persistent feature of this style of nationalism was, and is, that it is *official*- i.e. something emanating from the state, and serving the interests of the state first and foremost” (2006: 159). States mutually acknowledge each other's sovereignty over its own people and territory; only states are full members in the United Nations, or can send delegates to the Olympic Games.

Dialogue about nationalism is often consigned to marginalized, schismatic groups, which seem to exist outside of the apparently legitimate global network of nations. Although driven by the same impulses, sharp distinctions are drawn between nationalisms that have been officially sanctioned by other “nation-states” and those seen as interlopers in the global order. Nations not in possession of states emerged alongside nation-states. Only half of the states in the United Nations recognize Kosovo’s statehood. Recognition of nationhood is sometimes arbitrary, because it is unscientific. Billig notes that although certain forms of nationalism are viewed as positive, and as fundamentally distinct from

negative nationalist forces like fascism, its pretention of normalcy does not make it benign (1995). It is precisely this sense of the presently existing polities' naturalness that makes it so important for national identity to be addressed.

Along with committing their own alterations, regimes must assert a claim of continuity over their nations. The Soviet decision to move the center of power from St. Petersburg, the center of imperial power established by Peter the Great, to the Moscow Kremlin, seen as the ancestral home of Russia, illustrated the fledgling state's need to establish a context for change within a greater national history. The state's need to establish continuity is most acute at times of strife and change:

The model of official nationalism assumes its relevance above all at the moment when revolutionaries successfully take control of the state, and for the first time in a position to use the power of the state in pursuit of their visions. The relevance is all the greater insofar as even the most determinedly radical revolutionaries always, to some degree, inherit the state from the fallen regime (Anderson 2006: 159).

Continuing traditions, which are not in opposition to the new state's traditions, can make dramatic changes more palatable to the everyday citizen.

Locating a nation on a historical plane deepens its sense of naturalness and inevitability, and helps entrench it into its followers' emotions. As Michael Billig states: "An identity is not a thing; it is a short-hand description for ways of talking about the self and community" (1995: 60). Benedict Anderson notes that nationalism is more a belief system than a philosophy (Anderson 2006: 5, 7). He points out that nationalism, like religion, is obsessed with "death and immortality," and works to create "links between the dead and the yet unborn" (Anderson 2006: 11). Although John Hutchinson concedes the role of myth in the narration of war, he states that narration of suffering can help to heal shared pain, and give meaning to personal tragedies (48: 2007). National identity

helps to explain the unexplainable, and to work to diffuse collective suffering through mass rituals.

Eric Hobsbawm argues that an essential component of the idea of nationhood is its novelty within the context of greater history. The concept of nationhood, defined during the Age of Revolution by the formula “nation=state=people,” evolved over time to accommodate those populations recognized by other nations to have legitimate national identities (Hobsbawm 1990: 23). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as political movements such as the socialists began to recognize national identity’s potential to mobilize mass populations, “it increasingly did matter how ordinary common men and women felt about nationality” (Hobsbawm 1990: 43, 45). Nationalism allows its followers to view themselves as contributors to something greater than themselves:

In their irrationality and even perversity, however, myths are created by man in response to challenges and questions posed by the conditions of their lives; thus, myths reflect reality or, what is the same thing, the history of a society- even if the reflection is distorted (Cherniavsky 1961: 3).

Anderson notes that the advent of nationalism coincided with the retreat of religion; in the absence of religion’s structure and sense of higher purpose, nationalism has become a method of combating the spiritual “darkness” accompanying modernity (2006: 10; 11). Nationalism depends on the notion that it always has been, and always will be. Creation of a history is always an important focus for fledgling nations.

A recurring problem in Russian history is the shedding, creation, and rediscovery of national symbols. One of the great Russian historical trends is an abrupt breaking off with the past. It is possible to trace this impulse to Peter the Great, who created a new culture amongst the nobility by demanding rapid westernization. What is most relevant to Russian national culture today, however, is understanding the creation of national

traditions under the Soviet Union, the loss of those traditions, and the creation of traditions in the contemporary Russian Federation. Through a variety of symbols, Russia has molded its national narrative to suit the times.

While the Soviet Union systematically disposed of the religious lilt of Russian culture, it utilized many of Orthodoxy's devices to encourage its citizens' "faith." In the manner of a religion, the Soviet Union wished its citizens to believe in a higher purpose; the Communists replaced prayers and icons with oaths, sayings, and propaganda. Soviet Premiers such as Lenin and Stalin replaced images of Christ and the Madonna, and Lenin's tomb became a shrine for citizens' secular worship. Replete with tales of miraculous acts, ordinary workers took the place of saints as models for everyday life (Hosking 2007). The state secularized some holidays that had traditionally been inflected with religion, such as Maslenitsa and Harvest festivals, and their management taken over by the regime. Victory Day became an essential day for celebrating national heritage, commemorating victory over the Nazis. Important life cycle events were particularly contentious. The Soviets attempted to create new life events, such as children's' initiation into the Young Pioneers with the gift of a scarf and the saying of an oath. During the 1950s, the state encouraged wedding ceremonies in the hope a higher marriage rate would improve the birth rate (Hosking 2006: 325). These ceremonies were adorned with new traditions, such as music, wedding palaces, and the lighting of an eternal flame. In other areas, the Soviet regime was not so successful in replacing traditional practices. Many people continued to baptize their children. Matters of death were particularly stubborn; people largely disregarded the authorities and held traditional burials, and even

official, fully atheist, funerals also strongly resembled traditional practices (Hosking 2006: 327).

After the end of the USSR, the reemerging Russian state needed to address the collective baggage of Soviet rule and the Imperial age in order to shape a new national language of symbols. For instance, the Imperial Seal was readopted, including the religious symbol of St. George slaying a dragon. Christ the Savior Cathedral was rebuilt at the heart of Moscow, and Tsar Nicholas II and his family were reburied in St. Petersburg. Yet as aspects of the prerevolutionary legacy were reclaimed, Soviet iconography could not be entirely eliminated. Vladimir Lenin's body was never reburied, but remained entombed in Red Square. The Russian army flag currently in use still features a red background and a star, although its hammer and sickle was eliminated. The national anthem was particularly contentious; Yeltsin instituted a wordless composition by Glinka, but Putin reclaimed the Soviet anthem's music, with new words by Sergei Mikhalkov, who 60 years prior had composed the original lyrics.

### 1.3 *Geography of the Nation*

Assignment of geographical space is often an important component of constructing a national narrative. Such a space is suggested via visual cues, such as natural monuments and images on maps. The nation's domain is demarcated by historical and current events, providing an eternal setting to otherwise ephemeral moments in time. The creation of such a space allows the member of a nation to feel connected to, and responsible for, places he or she will likely never see. The land can function as the

physical embodiment of the nation. When the Olympic games were located within Russian territory, they also took place within the Russian imagination of the homeland. Although the honor of hosting the Olympic games is apparently bestowed upon particular cities, and not states, the Sochi Olympics could not be viewed separately from their backdrop within the nation's territory.

According to some nationalists, it is impossible to separate the land from the nation. V.V. Dokuchaev was a soil scientist who wrote in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to describe the trend of “macro-regions” in which “the combined phenomena of the organic and inorganic realms— for example, geology, physiology, climate, flora and fauna— interconnected into a single network to create a cohesive and distinctive totality” (Bassin 2007: 45). The homeland consisted of a wide variety of topographical phenomena, which fit together as a spiritual whole. Like the nation, this space is imagined into reality, allowing its believers to experience an expanded image of themselves and their place in the world: “geographical space is not a material entity, a real-existing parcel of soil and water through which the group refracts and manipulates its self-image, but rather a discursive *subject* of national imagination” (Bassin 2007: 143). National homelands have the legitimacy of physical places, but the imaginative freedom of created realities.

Certain natural archetypes and landmarks are scene as particularly Russian, and can be invoked to represent the Russian nation. Russia is continuously described as large and diverse. The word *prostor* refers to an open space, an expanse, connoting a kind of freedom: “*prostor* ‘bursts from Russian lips at the sight of spaces, far vistas, steppes... the longing for *prostor* is engrained in the Russian heart.’ This great scale (*mashtab*) is linked in literature, philosophy, and speech to *dusha*, with its craving to open, expand”

(Pesmen 2000: 67). The expansiveness of the land seems to prove the greatness of the Russian nation. The names and images of rivers and mountains invoke both specific memories of particular places and personal experiences, and grander ideas of a spiritual homeland. A natural, universalized symbol of the Russian land is the birch tree. First invoked in the paintings of 19<sup>th</sup> century artist Ivan Sishkin, birch trees function well as symbols because they are both physically present and mythologized. The Russian land is viewed as intrinsic to Russianness. Dale Pesmen recounts an old Russian teacher's description of Omsk: "She told me how a person's *dusha* (soul) doesn't lose its *dukhovnost'* [spirituality] when it interacts with nature..." (2000: 23). By interacting with nature, the Russian people can grow close to the deepest facets of their identity.

The impulse to create a nation-state is problematic, because many groups that self identify as nations do not fit neatly within national boundaries. Some, such as the Kurds or the Romani, have strong national identity but no state of their own. Other nations, such as the Germans, possess their own state, but are also composed of groups and individuals across other states that also identify as German. Historical narratives often differ or contradict between nations. Palestinian and Israeli nationals both claim to be the original possessor of Israeli territory, and maintain that their homeland was seized by the illegitimate other. Since the establishment of the Israel as a modern state, failure to reconcile these two competing visions of history has manifested as violent conflict. Similarly, In Russia, those who are considered to be external to the nation may dwell within the nation's borders, but will still be seen as fundamentally foreigners. According to Alexander Verkhovsky: "Under 'migrant', judging from its context, is understood any person who is 'not native' to a certain region (part of the country, district), and who has



moved (in fact or just supposedly) to this region” (2007: 129). Nations’ claiming of particular territories locates imagined identities in a tangible place.

#### 1.4 *The Nation and the Rest: Creating an Other*

Nations are often defined in relation to those groups that do not belong. This differentiation may be manifest between the motherland and another “foreign” nation, or between the majority population and a minority. Nationalism often appears in its most extreme forms when the “other” is conceived as a threat, whether real or fabricated. This form of nationalism can be used to galvanize support for state policies, such as a war effort. In other instances, it may be expressed in acts of guerilla violence. Xenophobia and anti-Semitism are both manifestations of this form of nationalism.

Various changes in societies during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century led nationalism to take a defensive pose. Urbanization, decolonization, world wars, and other changes fundamentally altered the average person’s daily life, and weakened their ties to traditional communities and life cycle scripts; these and other forces seemed to threaten peoples’ very identities. As economies modernized and populations rapidly became more mobile, national identities provided a sense of continuity (Hobsbawm 1990: 165). Nationalism both softened the blow of modernization for ordinary people, and exploited its anxious energy. Ernest Gellner associates nationalism with competition for resources:

If there is such potential for differentiation, the better-placed groups have an incentive to use cultural differences to restrict competition for resources such as jobs, houses and schooling. Equally, the disadvantaged groups can use such distinctions to justify and motivate the goal of political autonomy in one’s own language will dominate the educational system, speakers of one’s language will rule and government can promote the ‘national’ interest. (Breuilly 2006: xxv)

National identities also allowed states to increase demands on their citizens, and to harness their animosity toward other groups.

The growth of defensive nationalism during the 20<sup>th</sup> century not only spurred the creation of nationalism, but also some of the greatest atrocities in human history. This is due, in part, to the demarcation of nationhood according to ethnic lines. In elevating those born into the nation, other groups were seen as on an inferior plane. Increases in nationalist sentiment are often accompanied by backlashes against minorities. In insisting upon a nation's greatness, all other nations must be comparatively somewhat less-than great. In order to find the purest expression of nationhood, polluting foreign elements are driven out, even from the language:

There is a an evident analogy between the insistence of racists on the importance of racial purity and the horrors of miscegenation, and the insistence of so many-one is tempted to say of most- forms of linguistic nationalism on the need to purify the national language from foreign elements. (Hobsbawm 1990: 108)

Whereas the nation is seen as natural and inevitable, foreign elements are seen as corrosive, inferior to the truth represented by the nation.

Contemporary discourse about national identity often concerns the tension between traditional nationalism and modern cosmopolitan values. Cosmopolitanism necessitates the weakening of national ties in favor of an internationalist vision of human identity. Such a vision transcends cultural differentiation, instead emphasizing mankind's commonalities. As the idea of nationalism emerged along with mass literacy and communication, modern innovations such as increased international travel and the Internet facilitated the emergence of the idea of a cosmopolitan identity. However, this idea appeared just as the concept of nationalism achieved its greatest global influence.

The Olympic Games are illustrative of this trend. While ostensibly a show of Universalist values, the Games reinforce traditional national identity. The Games promote the peaceful interaction of clearly defined, unified nations. Nations acknowledge other nations' existence, confirming their fellows' right to national differentiation. National identities are confirmed by juxtaposition with other national identities. Like holidays, mega events create an emotional experience for the nation to share: "The participants are aware that the day of celebration, on which the nation is collectively remembered, is itself a moment which is to be remembered....These are conventional carnivals of surplus emotion, for the participants to have special feelings, whether of joy, sorrow or inebriation" (Billig 1995: 45). Nations collectively experience sporting events, as they experience a collective national history. Although these moments are represented as belonging to all nations, nations are primarily concerned with the reproduction of their states' images.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE NATION AS SPECTACLE

#### 2.1 *The Media*

No story can become part of the national consciousness before it is narrated. Media organizations construct lenses of nations and news for their audiences, framing current events within a sense of enduring legacy and socio-cultural place. In creating a sense of common experience, the media is a powerful device for reinforcing and rehearsing national identity. Amongst forms of news, sports reach a particularly broad and diverse audience, because they are of interest to many who would otherwise be disconnected from national and international events. Sports are an ideal news story, a reliable source of drama, characters, and conflict, and both audiences and media organizations show a preference for the dependable: “the daily dramas of victory and defeat, heroes and villains, underdogs and outsiders; of rebirths and small deaths, rebellion and innovation, right and wrong” (Steen 2011: 217). The association of sports with leisure creates a distance between them and those forms of news seen as “serious,” such as politics, but sports appeal to a very real set of emotions, penetrating into the consciousness of a wide-ranging audience:

Sports may be perceived as frivolous for some, but it rouses the passions of millions who read the rear section of a newspaper and rarely turn to the front... Such is the depth of interest in sport, and so magnetized are advertisers, that proprietors have permitted their editors an increasing amount of space, leading to discrete sports section (Steen 2011: 215).

Loyalty to sports teams, like nationalism, is an imagined entity, which depends upon continuous rehearsal by a group of adherents. If people did not participate in sports culture, it would cease to exist. Sports are both a form of entertainment, and a social ritual. During the Olympics and other international sports competitions, members of the

media who cover sport often impart their own excitement and enthusiasm through their writing: “Sportswriters in the end like sport and many will see this as some kind of pinnacle, for the nation and their own career” (Steen 2011: 225).

Sports coverage helps to demarcate a sense of conceptual national locality. The media’s facility to reinforce national identity is indicated in the language it uses to confer meaning: “*The* nation becomes *the* place, as the centre of the universe contracts to the national borders” (Billig 1995: 115). News media impart a sense of common experience, implicating their readers as participants in history:

Routinely, newspapers, like politicians, claim to stand in the eye of the country. Particularly in their opinion and editorial columns, they use the nationalized syntax of hegemony, simultaneously speaking to and for the nation, and representing the nation in both senses of ‘representation’. They evoke a national ‘we’, which includes the ‘we’ of reader and writer, as well as the ‘we’ of the universal audience” (Billig 1995: 115).

Both readers and reporters are implicated in the experience of the nation. This also functions for sports; by offering their fandom to one team, readers can share in the national Olympic teams’ successes and failures and in the collective viewing experience. Sports coverage also appeals to its audience’s sense of history, in part by encouraging the audience to anticipate events before they occur.

Sports reporting constructs a sense of predetermined reality, creating a feeling of ongoing national historical experience. In the words of Michael Skey, the media works to create a sense of inevitability about the existence of nations: “the idea that the world is naturally divided up into nations, individuals belong to a nation and, as a result, have certain beliefs, characteristics, responsibilities and entitlements” (2014: 14). Sports replicate the same experience along a scheduled basis, maintaining a set of “official” rules and practices over time. The association of teams with particular geographical

regions further assures that the identity of the region becomes tied to the identity of the particular place. Mega-events work particularly well to create a sense of history in motion. Rachael Miyung Joo describes a feeling of “nostalgia for the present” that Koreans felt during the World Cup, precipitated by an enormous feeling of anticipation and a feeling of experiencing history: “The ability to record (and review and delete) every moment digitally helped create a collectively edited memory that captured the right feeling for the time” (2012: 2). Sports draw a mass audience’s attention to a single event, encouraging them to share in a common emotive experience.

Sports coverage creates a sense of the athlete as an exemplary member of the nation, who embodies the collective wishes and desires of the group. As in any story, the media must construct certain figures as principal players in sports drama. Although athletes represent a very small minority of the population, they take on a unique symbolic position. Their successes and failures become associated with the success and failures of the nation: “the ontological confusion of humans as individuals with nations as collectivities finds artistic expression in Olympic events for a global audience” (Tzanelli 2013: 6). Heroes bear the burden of the nation’s collective desires: “The ‘hopes’ of the ‘headlines’ are not attributed to any particular persons: they are not even ‘our hopes’ . They are disembodied, universal hopes, which all of ‘us’- all reasonable readers- are invited to share with the paper” (Billig 1995: 113). Rooting for a sports team or player who represents a particular connectivity naturally becomes entangled with support for that entity. Particularly during international competitions, athletes are not viewed as independently acting individuals, but representatives of particular entities: “The sports media are charged with the daily task of rendering nations to themselves weighing and

classifying citizens and their actions” (Rowe, McKay & Miller: 133). Media organizations seize a level of authority, depicting and analyzing athletes’ trials. Although certain players are certainly more talented than others, it is the media that construct them as characters, and the public which interprets these messages: “heroes are constructed in an interactive process... the term “unsung hero” is an oxymoron.” (Berg 2013: 135). Heroism, within itself, does not exist except as it is constructed in the minds of audiences.

Over time, sport became one of the most reliable and lucrative sources of news. Sport has not long been regarded with much respect amongst the media: “In the 1980s, the sports desk was still dismissed, sneeringly, by other members of staff as what US sport broadcaster Howard Cosell called ‘the toy department of human life’” (Stern 215). As general sales of publications waned, it became clear that sports were a way to hold on to a broader audience. News organizations have had to change their practices in order to adapt to increased competition from new forms of media. Television, and then the Internet, seized onto territory that had long exclusively belonged to newspapers. News organizations must court audiences, who lure advertisers:

The kids will jump sites that are lazy and not disclosing anything- the advertisers will see the hits figures and career death will follow fast for the lazy editor and the uninspired reporter who isn’t giving the readers what they want. A few well-crafted blogs could kill most current sports sections in the new world. The advertisers will follow the fans’ wishes. It could happen very fast. (Steen 2011: 218)

Sportswriters cannot merely follow their own intuition about what is newsworthy, but must consider what is marketable to their audience.

As media has become increasingly commercial, members of the media have a lucrative interest in characterizing athletes as appealing characters. According to Boorstin and Strate, media constructions of heroism “trivial[ize] the notion of the hero and

ultimately replac[e] the hero with the celebrity” (Berg 2013: 136). Whereas heroes embody certain values, the celebrity is based on image; the hero literally or abstractly fights for a certain cause, while the celebrity merely intrigues and entertains. Members of the media winnow characterization of athletes, constructing them as physical archetypes appealing to audiences: “attractive physical appearance, physical strength and prowess and ability to perform and entertain hide the absence of intellectual and moral strength” (Berg 2013: 137). During the Olympics, audiences not only wish to support their countries; they want to witness extraordinary feats: “It is assumed that they wish to see representatives of their nation at work, but it is also believed that they wish to see a more transcendent excellence- they want to watch the best” (Rowe, McKay, & Miller 2002: 128). In this sense, contemporary sports heroes are often depicted as relatively shallow personalities.

Russia possesses a well-cultivated culture of controlled media. Under the Soviet Union, ideological unification was viewed as essential to building a unified socialist state. During Perestroika, state control over press loosened, culminating in the wild reorganization of the nineties. Russian media has never been cleanly divided into censored and uncensored media, but instead reflects competing impulses to both analyze events and to reflect officially endorsed messages. Philosopher Mikhail Kapustin believed that there were three dominating cultures in the USSR: “the official (‘the culture of the automatons’), the oppositional (dissident), and the culture that balanced between them... Yea-saying propagandists seeking promotion were not respected by the community... Journalists were respected” (Azhgikhina 2007: 1250). Understanding what is self-censorship, and what is an infusion of writers’ and official ideology, is virtually



impossible. Nevertheless, events of recent years have undeniably led to broad spread restrictions on freedoms of press (Freedom House).

Sports coverage in the Soviet Union was anything but apolitical; the Soviet quickly saw that sports could be used to convey propaganda messages to a broad mass audience. The media was used to frame sports culture according to Soviet ideals:

It is the task of Soviet sports-writers to reveal the purpose and functions of physical culture, its role as an active means of shaping people physically and culturally.' Moreover, sport- and the sporting press, by virtue of its popular nature, is regarded as a convenient vehicle of carrying overt political messages" (Sport v SSSR, as in Riordan 1980: 282).

Sports periodicals, which often including political speeches and stories of politicians visiting sports venues, grew in popularity, and demand far exceeded supply; in 1975, there were 46 sports periodicals, with a collective circulation of 8 million (Riordan 1980: 283). The government's control of publishing allowed it to choose which sports were most widely reported, and the number of periodicals published reflected preference for certain sports over others. The government believed that some sports were more beneficial to society than others. This did not always align with the reality of what was popular in the country. Chess had the most periodicals, while "Such evidently more popular sports as soccer, athletics and ice hockey have only one journal each specifically dealing with their sport both among central and local periodicals, while volleyball, basketball and skiing have none" (Riordan 1980: 284) Gymnastics also received official support, due to its aesthetic attributes (Riordan 1980: 284).

From Perestroika until the beginning of Putin's administration, freedoms of press rapidly increased, although progress was adulterated by other challenges of the times. Nadezhda Azhgikhina argues that one of the few accomplishments of perestroika was the

establishment of free press, which inherited some of the positive qualities of Soviet journalism: “service to the reader, belief in human beings and moral priorities” (Azhgikhina 2007: 1250). After the fall, non-professionals rushed into journalism, flooding the market and lowering overall quality, while oligarchs gained control over television programming (Azhgikhina 2007).

Over the course of the last fifteen years, the press situation has become considerably less free. Information, which had become rapidly dispersive during the 1990s, became increasingly centralized and controlled. According to Masha Gessen, the state’s takeover of Vladimir Gusinsky’s empire lasted a year, beginning when the headquarters of his media conglomerate, Media-Most, were raided:

In April 2001, after a weeklong standoff when NTV staff maintained a live broadcast of the takeover, the old editorial staff was forced out. A week later, my former colleagues at the magazine *Itogi* came to work to find the doors locked and every last staff member fired. (Gessen 2012: 164).

Other independent organizations met a similar fate. Whereas oppositional writings have a very limited audience, as of 2007, 1/3 of Russians were reported to watch NTV (Azhgikhina 2007: 1251). According to the Russian Union of Journalists, during the 2008 elections, Vladimir Putin received four times the “advantage over the next-best-covered contender” on NTV (Gessen 2012: 188). The state conglomerate Gazprom owns even Ekho Moskvyy, a radio station known for its investigative journalism. Crackdowns spiked again with the “ideological *zachistka* [cleansing]” before the 2008 Elections (Azhgikhina 2007: 1245). All of these actions ultimately led to unprecedented public distrust of the media: “Never before have journalists been blamed so much for corruption, bribe taking, dishonesty, and even collaboration with enemy intelligence services” (Azhgikhina 2007: 1260). Since of June 2003, “when the last independent national television network, TVS,

was seized by the government, allegedly to settle the company's debts, all Russian national television networks have been controlled by the government or by economic interests that support the government and uniformly praise the president” (Freedom in the World 2006).

The nonprofit organization Freedom House describes various coercive measures used against media which step out of line, including libel suits, financial suits, and other forms of prosecution: “they repeatedly made it clear that they had the discretion to interpret the laws, and that members of civil society were always vulnerable” (Freedom of the Press 2014). These measures typically benefit from legislation that purports to be about other forms of crime. 2012 and 2013 laws, claiming to crack down on child pornography and piracy, were used to crack down on opposition websites (Freedom of the Press 2014). In 2012, Ria Novosti was abolished, and was replaced with the pro-Kremlin Rossiya Sevodnya. In 2013, the online news agency Rosbalt was ordered closed on the grounds that its site used “obscene language” (Freedom of the Press 2014).

Violence against journalists also undermines Russian freedom of speech. News stories relating to terrorism or the Caucasus are particularly prone to drawing the state’s ire. Rates of violence against journalists are nearly unmatched, and not only in developed countries but also in all countries: “Since 1991, more than 200 Russian journalists have died in the line of duty, and most were not working in hot spots or war zones” (Azhgikhina 2007: 1249). Attempts to hold people responsible for these cases were inhibited by a lack of political will to prosecute, and disconnection between the news organizations, prosecutors and law enforcement; therefore, journalists may be attacked with relative impunity (Azhgikhina 2007: 1248). The organization Novaya Gazeta has

been particularly vulnerable to attack; in recent years, journalists reporting on controversial topics such as neo-Nazis and the Northern Caucasus have been killed in unsolved crimes. Journalism in Russia is not merely an occupation, but a life-threatening risk.

## *2.2 Opening Ceremony*

The opening ceremonies set the Olympics apart from every other sports event, locating the Games within a particular cultural and historical place as defined by the state. The ceremonies are easily the most watched portion of the Olympics, and have one of the largest audiences of any event in the world. That one in five people watch the opening ceremonies, according to John MacAloon, makes them “far and away the greatest, documented, more or less simultaneous attention to a single scheduled event in human history” (MacAloon 1981: 32). MacAloon notes that this quality of sports contrast with the differentiating quality of the opening ceremonies:

With the sports contests themselves, nearly everything tends in the opposite direction, toward standardization and a culture-defying homogeneity. What athletes and international federations want when they speak of ideal performance conditions is a track or swimming pool that is exactly the same everywhere. (Macaloon 1981: 42)

Although a degree uniformity is required of the Olympic venues, the ceremonies permit host nations to issue declarations of their unique identity, and establish context. Russian viewers sitting at home were reminded that the ceremony was not simply a spectacle, but that it belonged to them, and represented their collective identity as Russians. During the ceremony the host is juxtaposed with other nations, who appear only as groups of

undifferentiated players, and are only represented by flags, uniforms, and brief commentary by a television announcer. The founder of the modern Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin, believed that opening ceremonies were what should separate the Olympics from other world championships, and should be marked with a degree of “solemnity and ceremonial” (1966: 157).

While apparently proffering a nostalgic historical narrative, the performance as a whole was less an exercise in nostalgia than an ode to Russian progress. In the Sochi Winter Olympics opening ceremony, Russia articulated a particular image of itself or, as repeatedly stated, a “dream” of its nation. Overall, this “dream” places Russian history on a continuum of progress; Russia, it posited, was and will always be a nation of artistic and scientific creation. This exhibition attempted to rebuke those who view Russia as backwards. A cleansed image of Russia was presented, framing its innovation through a lens of purity as embodied by a small girl, Lubov. The ceremony oriented itself within this forward-leaning timeline, referencing itself as yet another product of Russia progressiveness. Nevertheless, performance is as much about the production of an image as it was about its reception. Much like the trials and tribulations that followed the games’ construction and expenditure, several highly visible gaffes triggered the press’s attention at home and abroad, sometimes overshadowing the ceremony’s artistry and intended message.

During the Sochi Opening ceremony, the theme of “love” was used as a device to tie together the spectacle, seeming to imply the general benevolence of Russia’s accomplishments. More space is permitted to performances for subjective portrayals of reality; rather than providing straightforward analysis of history, artistry may interpret

events through a particular, emotion-charged, lens. There were references to love throughout the display, depicting the meeting and falling in love of lovers throughout time. The ceremony intertwined images of love and of Russia's accomplishments, juxtaposing Russian ideas and inventions with the nostalgia inducing idea of childhood. Soldiers returned from the war with Napoleon, back to the arms of their women. Ballet, literature, and love combined as Tolstoy's War and Peace heroine, Natasha Rostova, encountered her love, dancing amongst other ballerinas similarly engaged. After a period of struggle, all seemed to be healed as Soviet men and women come together, married and produced children. In this telling of history, obstacles such as wars were merely brief interludes between periods of prosperity. Colorfully dressed aristocrats in the Imperial period and joyful Soviet *stilyagi* ['hipsters'] were cast as representative of Russian culture during their eras.

The opening ceremony located the Russian nation within the physical and cultural plane of Russia's past and present. The preliminary segment, assigning a Russian cultural accomplishment to every letter of the Russian Cyrillic alphabet, created a link between the essence of the Russian language and its cultural fabric. The following scene, in which Lubov flew across floating slices of Russian terrain suspended in the center of the stadium, selected certain natural and cultural scenes and labeled them as particular to the Russian land. Reconstructions of birches, Lake Baikal, and the Kamchatka volcano were held up as icons of contemporary Russia. As the Olympic rings descended into the stadium, a mass of people dressed in gold in white garb appeared. The Channel 1 [Pervyi Kanal] televised narrator stated that these costumes represented the diverse peoples of Russia. This expanse, the ceremony suggested, is what makes up Russia.

The image of a young girl serving as the visual narrator of the spectacle operated as an icon of innocence. She was the hero of the opening ceremony, with whom the audience is invited to witness the spectacle. She is an eleven-year-old girl the ceremony named as Lubov, which the alphabet segment reminded the viewer also means love in Russian. Lubov displays many cultural hallmarks of innocence: she is female, pretty, blonde, and a child, dressed in a long white nightgown. The video prelude showed her performing the most childlike of actions; she was shown falling asleep, and then wandering into a beautiful and peaceful dream world. Her delicacy was further emphasized when she was hoisted up into the air, and then juxtaposed with the gigantic and technically complex display. As the ceremony's protagonist she was a device to represent the Russian people; during the alphabet segment, the word "Russia" is assigned to the letter "Ya," which also mean "I." At the end of the segment depicting the Soviet period, Lubov releases a red balloon, symbolizing Russia's letting go of the Communist Dream. The audience is encouraged to view otherwise difficult topics with a sense of wonderment at their creation; Russia is a nation of dreamers, the narrator says. The ceremony encourages its audience to view the ceremony, and by extension the Russian culture, with the same sense of awe.

Despite the attempts to soften Russia's image throughout the exhibition, the entire spectacle was also clearly designed to impress upon the viewer Russia's enormous cultural strength and energy, and the state's ability to organize and distribute this energy to create something for the nation. The sheer cost of the Sochi Olympics was purported to be greater than that of all previous Winter Olympics combined. Images of the past were constructed with ostentatious and obviously costly technology. The continuous listing of

Russian accomplishments of art, politics and science constantly reminded the viewer that Russia not only was the first in space, but also the nation that gave the world Tchaikovsky. An odd pairing was chosen for the letter “T”: Tolstoy and television. This dichotomy is illustrative of the desire to appeal to both art and technology, and to both the Imperial and the Soviet eras. The narrative of Russian history began with a video showing the arrival of the Vikings. The imperial period concluded with a blaze of fire; it stood in the way of Russian progress. Creation and construction were emphasized over destruction, illustrated by the building of a boat, the establishment of St. Petersburg, the growth and prosperity of the Soviets. It is noteworthy that the period that received the least narrative space was the 1990s. Struggles were conveyed not as obstacles, but as landmarks upon a course of progress.

Although the opening ceremony worked to emphasize Russia’s cultural diversity, Russia was depicted first and foremost as a Western-oriented country. Its narrative of scientific and social progress fit squarely within the Western construction of modernity. Images of Greek and French builders placed Russia within a European historical narrative. The extensive segment about the building of St. Petersburg called attention to what is considered to be the most European Russian city. Under Peter the Great, the Channel 1 narrator stated, “the country opens to the world, and becomes part of Europe.” The “new state,” according to the new narrator, was built upon the shaving of beards, the creation of a military, and a new, recognizably European, city. The display referenced different icons of the European modernization process: the building of an iconic city; a culturally rich imperial period; the trauma of world war; industrialization; eventual



economic prosperity. These details, along with artistic and technological innovation, situate Russia firmly within the framework of the first world.

The Channel 1 coverage emphasized the Sochi Olympic games as reflective Russia's literal and cultural heft. Its narration deepened the connection between the viewer sitting at home and the events in Sochi, emphasizing the audience's ownership of the spectacle. It confirmed that Russia itself is on display, not merely a particular conception of the nation. These images are "eternal," the narrator stated: "Every one of us has seen such a picture many times." This phrasing placed both the Olympic games and the viewer within the historical continuum of the nation: "today," the narrator states, "the future is here." The narrator romanticized the physical location of the Russian nation, reminding the viewer that Russia is "the biggest country in the world, where Europe meets with Asia." He directly implicated his audience in the performance, including them in the discourse of the nation: "Who are we? Where are we from? Where are we going?" Near the end, he concluded that Lubov "now knows her place on a little blue planet," inviting his audience to follow her example. He emphasized that the Russian athletes made up the "biggest delegation." He worked to incorporate the display of "boundless" cultural diversity into the national narrative, reminding the viewer that diversity is a source of pride. Of the 190 peoples in Russia, he said, each has its "own language, their own music, their own anthems." This continued the theme of Russia's enormity and cultural richness.

Sport.ru's opening ceremony coverage defended some of the performance's mishaps. Although it posted a viral image of Russia's Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev apparently sleeping during the ceremony, the article distanced itself from these

commenters: “We will not further reflect upon what is now waiting for him on the ruthless Internet.”<sup>1</sup> When addressing the failure of the fifth Olympic ring to open, the article was quick to blame the Internet’s enthusiasm for criticism of the ceremony: “The director quickly changed the camera without making it clear how quickly the composition acquired the demanded form. But the photo of the four opened rings flew across the Internet.”<sup>1</sup> The Internet was framed as being fundamentally opposed to the ceremony’s success, and by extension as opposed to the success of the Russian nation. Sport.ru, however, did take notice that the ceremony had not spent much time discussing the 1990s. It stated that it was “perplexing” the telling of the country’s history concluded immediately after the Soviet period.<sup>1</sup> The ceremony made it appear as if Russian history moved smoothly between the fall of the old regime and the present day.

NTV’s coverage offered even fewer discussion points, and largely described a seemingly ideal spectacle. Vladimir Putin particularly received a significant proportion of the coverage of the ceremonies. One article describes the interest Putin took in the athletes, showing him to urge the athletes not to “slack off,” and praises the “scale and entertainment” of the Games.<sup>2</sup> Although not an athlete, he emerged as one of the primary figures of the Games, a hero for all heroes. The NTV website did not mention the mishap with the fifth Olympic ring until February 17<sup>th</sup>; a photograph of the incomplete rings accompanied an article stating that the stunt would be fixed and attempted during the closing ceremony.

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<sup>1</sup> Puchkov, Pavel. "Itogy dnya. 7 sobyti tseremoni otkrytiya Olimpiady." *Sport.ru*. N.p., 8 Feb. 2014. Web. 16 Feb. 2014.

<sup>2</sup> “Putin poprosil sportsmenov i organizatorov Olimpiady ‘ne rasslablyatsya.’” *Olimpiada v Sochi // NTV.Ru*. N.p. Web. 1 May 2014.

Novaya Gazeta published the most nuanced coverage of the opening ceremony, offering criticism of the government's behavior. Its articles cast doubt onto the idea of the strong and well managed state. Both during the events and in the preceding weeks, Novaya Gazeta continued to critique the widespread corruption and human rights abuses surrounding the games. The article immediately referred to part of the controversy surrounding the Olympics, saying that whatever was shown in the ceremony was what did not fall victim to "thievery."<sup>3</sup> The author concluded that despite the enormous waste and expense, the spectacle was still enjoyable; "the kids are still cute, the message of good will still palpable."<sup>3</sup> This article was a concession to the power of the spectacle; it suggested that the creation an amazing show that appealed to the emotions of the Russian viewer overshadowed complex political discourse. Another article noted that the opening ceremony itself has become a competition; the planners feel the need to prove their nation's capabilities to the international and domestic audience to be superior to all other nations.<sup>4</sup> Although Novaya Gazeta's articles included criticism, they ultimately capitulated to the emotional appeal of the spectacle of the nation.

### *2.3 Closing Ceremony*

Olympics' closing ceremonies are traditionally smaller scale than opening ceremonies. However, this difference may allow for a softer, more emotion-based appeal.

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<sup>3</sup> Rost, Yuri and Vladimir Mozgovoy. "Polno strastyei." *Novaya Gazeta*. N.p., 8 Feb. 2014. Web. 1 May 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Rost, Yuri. "Okh, Shto ya videl!" *Novaya Gazeta*. N.p., 11 Feb. 2014. Web. 7 Apr. 2014.

As the Channel 1 commentator stated, the Sochi Olympics closing ceremonies were “more sentimental” than the opening. The performance’s main function was to cultivate the Sochi Olympics’ place within Russia’s cultural and historical legacy.

The ceremony began with images of Russian Sochi athletes flitting over Russian iconography, such as a birch forest, deepening the connection between the Olympics and Russian culture. The presentation narrated some of the most noteworthy athletic events during the Olympics. The ceremony repeated some of the images of the opening; the young girl Lubov appeared once again, flying in a boat over the Black Sea, this time accompanied by the children “Yura” and “Valya.” The Olympic rings were formed once again, this time by sequined dancers. The Games’ organizers lampooned and thus reclaimed the opening ceremony’s chief gaffe; the fifth ring of dancers delays opening for a few moments. The Russian Olympic gold medalists came forward, bearing the Russian flag. These athletes, the ceremony implied, are most representative of the Russian nation. The announcer reminded his audience “no one could have expected that many medals”; Russia exceeded expectations. An appearance by a children’s choir, like the presence of Lubov and her young friends, emphasized the fundamental purity of Russian nationalism, whereas the naturally militaristic appearance of the Moscow Military Choir reminded the viewer that innocence must be defended.

The majority of the closing ceremony was devoted to depicting Russia’s artistic accomplishments. Whereas the opening showcased Russian progress, the closing focused on Russia’s past. A Chagall painting was recreated, with an upside down village and floating dancers. A horde of clowns made an appearance. Although the sudden materialization of a circus tent was technologically impressive, clowns are perhaps the

ultimate example of retrograde human expression; they rely on their bodies to express themselves, not advanced technology. The same could be said of a performance of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2, a piece which the narrator referred to as the "Possibly the most popular classical music composition in history." Ballerinas from the Mariinsky and Bolshoi Ballets performed, honoring one of Russia's great old traditions. Perhaps the moment that most prominently features Russia's cultural legacy is a scene about Russian authors. Akhmatova, Tolstoy, Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Gogol, Lermontov, Turgenev, Blok, Gorky, and Bulgakov appear, writing at their desks and surrounded by floating snippets of their work and dancer donning period appropriate attire.

According to the closing ceremonies, the end of the Sochi Olympics was the conclusion of another great Russian story. A child was shown closing a book about the Sochi Olympics. The IOC organizer praised the Olympics for representing "The new Russia" and thus concluded "for us, these Games are the best ever." He framed the Sochi Olympics within the values of Olympism:

By living together under one roof in the Olympic village, you send a powerful message from Sochi to the world. The message of a society of peace, tolerance and respect. I appeal to everybody implicated in confrontation, oppression, or violence- act on this Olympic message of dialogue and peace.

He also singled out Vladimir Putin for thanks "for his personal commitment to the extraordinary success of these Olympic winter games."

Novaya Gazeta, Sport.ru, and NTV were overwhelmingly positive in their coverage. Novaya Gazeta noted that despite peoples' reservations, after Sochi Games

Russia “became a different country,” citing increased Russian national pride.<sup>5</sup> The article argues that the country’s success helped it to escape “jingoistic fervor,” implying that Russia’s success meant the nation’s emotional energy was directed toward expressing pride, rather than resentment towards another nation or nations. However, *Novaya Gazeta* continued to reference kickbacks, reminding its readers that it is foolish to assume the innocence of anyone who cuts themselves an inflated check.<sup>5</sup> While *Sport.ru*’s article, titled “The Marks of Hollywood: Why the Olympics Still Failed” seemed to portend criticism, the article’s general message was that Sochi was a not pure, Hollywood-style success, but a nuanced Russian success, which is marred by bitter moments.<sup>6</sup> In this article, the author Ivan Manchev acknowledged that some in the West compared the Olympics to those in 1936 Berlin. However, he argued that the heroes of the 1936 were Jesse Owens and Team Norway, whereas no parallel narrative of resistance overshadowed the officially promoted message at the Sochi Games. Overall, the article argued, Sochi was a “triumph of globalization and internationalism.” *Sport.ru*’s article was positive in the Russian way, with acknowledgement of reservations without actually criticizing the official narrative: “There is no way to absolutely praise something. But life goes on one way or another. And that is how it should be.” NTV’s article was once again simplistic, and repeated and praised the official narrative of events. NTV titled an article “America Assesses the Value of Self-Irony in the Olympics’ Closing,” seemingly seeking to make amends for the foreigners’ mocking the unopened Olympic ring.<sup>7</sup> The article is

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<sup>5</sup> "Nechayannoye Chastye." *Novaya Gazeta*. N.p., 26 Feb. 2014. Web. 3 Mar. 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Manchev, Ivan. “Gollivudskiye stampy na russkiy maner. Pochemu Olimpiada vsye usalas.” *Sport.ru*. 21 Feb. 2014. Web. 1 May 2014.

<sup>7</sup> “V SSHA otsenili samoironiyu organizatorov zakrytiya Olimpiady.” *Olimpiada v Sochi// NTV.ru*. 24 Feb. 2014. Web. 1 May 2014.

overwhelmingly positive in describing praise for the event. Reporting on the closing ceremony worked to cement an upbeat narrative of the Sochi Games.

## CHAPTER 3

### REPRESENTATIVES OF RUSSIA AT THE GAMES

#### 3.1 *Sports Culture*

Although the impact of sports may appear to be confined to leisure, sports influence the way their audiences and participants conceive themselves in relation to the world. Throughout Russian history, sports have been both reflective of social conditions and have impacted the way people interact with their society. The capacity of sports to bridge the gap between public and private social life makes them an ideal channel for reaching into the lives of ordinary people. The repetitive, ritualistic nature of sports games and events, and the building of institutions around sports, function much as the construction of national identities. Over time, sports develop a sense of naturalness and inevitability. Sports loyalties, like national loyalties, are not based in logic, but in the emotive ties between individuals interacting as athletes and as teams. In Russia, the state has long used sport to influence the cultivation of citizenship and a sense of national belonging.

The competitive nature of sport encourages nationalistic feeling, allowing nations to share in the glory of the teams who claim to represent them. According to Liubov Borusiak, Russian interest in sport is primarily piqued during international competitions, when Russian athletes face off with international competitors; when asked whether “sports make their lives full and meaningful,” only 4 percent of Russians polled in 1998 and 6 percent in 2007 agreed with this statement (Borusiak 2009: 58, 59). A portion of public interest in global sporting events results from people’s desire to take pride in their



country, which Borusiak claims is accompanied by a feeling of superiority: Sports victories are able to fulfill approximately the same function as war victories: victories in the most important sports competitions provide no less clear proof of the superiority of ‘our team’ over ‘theirs’” (Borusiak 2009: 61). People wish to take pride in themselves and in their communities. The ebbing of overall national confidence amongst Russians during the 1990s was matched by a decline in athletic accomplishments, decreasing interest in sports (Borusiak 2009). As overall conditions in Russia improved over the 2000s, Sochi Olympics offered an opportunity for Russians to reassert their athletic prowess.

Sport is an effective vehicle for the construction of national myths, because it encourages a unified vision of society. Despite undeniable cultural variations in any society, overall, sports allow participation and fan-ship across backgrounds, transcending race and class to bring people together in a common emotional and cooperative experience. Sport “den[ies] the fissures- of gender, class, ethnicity, media coverage, public participation, and region- that it sometimes tries to reconcile” (Rowe, McKay, & Miller 2002: 121). Sport possesses “inherent qualities of being easily understood and enjoyed, being capable of developing mass enthusiasm, being apolitical (at least superficially), and permitting safe self-expression” (Riordan 1980: 7). Sport promotes a myth of humanity as fundamentally cooperative. Although, as in the case of nations, sports related connections are imagined by the participants, sports inspire a very real emotional experience. At the same time, it draws clear lines between groups, and sets them into competition with one another.

Contemporary Russian sports culture grew out the Soviet era. Sports in the Soviet Union encompassed different levels of society, and were incorporated into life in schools, workplaces, and on the national and international stage. During this era (1917-1991), sport became a method of connecting different social sectors of society through rituals of shared participation and fandom. For the Soviets, sports were an essential component of creating an ideal society. The Soviets recognized that sports were an ideal means of “political socialization, political indoctrination and political integration” (Howell 1975: 144).

The Soviets believed that physical abilities would help to enable the creation of an ideal Soviet citizen. Although this idea was incorporated into communist ideology, it originates in the imperial period. Monarchists believed a duality of body and mind would enable “democratic and progressive” values (Riordan 1980: 43). Slavophiles also advocated strengthening the connections between physical and mental abilities, advancing a program of “simplicity, naturalness, moral strength and legitimacy” (Riordan 1980: 44). These beliefs primarily impacted the habits of the elite, and are reflected in the creation of sports organizations. In 1913, 1,226 sports clubs existed in Russia, with an average of 60 members each (Riordan: 33-34). The Soviets, however, were more concerned with the problem of adapting “a predominantly illiterate peasant nation” (Riordan 1980: 117) to the demands of Communist society, and hence the massive growth and attention to sports in Soviet Russia.

The Soviets explicitly connected the grooming of new citizens’ minds to the developing their physical fitness. The Soviets likewise linked physical fitness to the quality of workers, claiming that research proved that sport led to increased labor

productivity and reduced illness (Howell 1975: 144). To be admitted into the Komosomol, which was the direct route to eventual party membership, youth needed to be physically fit (Howell 1975: 141). It was believed that people's improved physical condition would extend to other levels of Soviet life, that could "put Russia on the forefront of world achievement" (Riordan 1980: 45). In this same vein, it was seen as important to incorporate sport into people's daily lives. After the 1950s, in particular, there was a great expansion of material prosperity and free time, spurring "weekend" leisure behavior, including investment in travel and in sports. Soviet society had rapidly urbanized, and in turn health quality improved. The concept of *massovost'* [mass participation] was introduced; participation in sports was strongly encouraged, even insisted upon, due in part to the association of sport with "belonging and of being part of a massively progressive and active society" (Howell 1975: 42). The Soviets also believed in what Reet Howell refers to as the "triangle theory," according to which the largest number of participants enables the most talented to be distinguished (1975: 142).

The Soviet state desired victory over foreign sportsmen, for the most part, in order to confirm, to its own citizenry, the superiority of the Soviet system and the capability of the Soviet government to guide the nation to success. Although Western media often preferred to conceive of Soviet and Russian behavior as directly related to its relationship with the West, the Soviets were principally concerned with domestic perceptions: "The sports system was not really designed to impress Westerners; it was principally for domestic and third world consumption" (Allison 1994: 95). According to Lincoln Allison and Terry Monnington: "The party leadership did not...harbour aspirations to world domination but were primarily concerned with control over their own territory and

existing sphere of influence” (2005: 12). During Soviet times, sporting victories were seen as victories for Communism: “It provides irrefutable proof of the superiority of socialist culture over the decaying culture of capitalist states” (Allison and Monnington 2005: 6). Although Russia had been one of the founding nations of the modern Olympics in 1898, the early Soviet government viewed the Olympics as “bourgeois...an elitist, nationalistic opiate” (Allison 2005: 93). However, after the war, “sports success abroad was meant to be a morale booster to assuage doubts about the superiority of the Soviet system, to provide a justification for all the efforts and sacrifice made to attain a strong state and higher standards of living” (Riordan 1980: 182).

The degree of Olympic success was commonly associated with the Soviet or Russian state’s broader capabilities. Olympic failures in early 20<sup>th</sup> century were seen as a “second Tsushima” - i.e., as indicators of larger societal backwardness. After 1945, the Soviet Union set itself about the task of asserting itself as a world power: “Despite the Soviet distaste for the kind of social privilege reflected in bourgeois ‘amateur’ status, Soviet sportsmen had to play the game according to these rules if they were going to play at all against the world’s best athletes” (Riordan 1980: 163). Despite these concessions to capitalist society, Reet Howell notes that despite the obvious privileges awarded to successful athletes, the Soviet government continued to insist that its athletes were amateurs: “they believe that professional sport is imbued with a spirit of profit and corruption which is akin to capitalists societies and harmful to the athlete’s health” (1975: 142).

### *3.2 Gender and Sports*

Following the Soviet Union's collapse, Russians suffered a crisis of national identity and disempowerment, which negatively and drastically impacted the lives of most citizens. Partly due to the forceful leadership of Vladimir Putin, however, the state and the economy began to rebound. As the Soviets had done before them, Russian leaders sought to host the Olympics, in part, to prove the Russian nation's strength. The preformative and physical characteristics of sport, along with the surrounding ceremonies and constructions of infrastructure, make it an ideal conductor for messages of national strength. Although women's success also conveys honor to the nation, constructions of national strength are particularly tied to men and masculinity. Sports such as men's hockey mimic the battlefield, flinging powerful, masculine members of the nation against one another in simulated combat. Women are on more equal footing with men when asked to support soft culture, as in sports framed as more artistic such as figure skating. These sports will be addressed in the following chapter.

The Olympics are the world's greatest display of the full capabilities of the human body. The body of the Olympic athlete is a finely tuned machine, asked to perform extraordinary feats and put them on display to the world. As the audience observes these physical acts through the frame constructed by their culture; a premium is placed on the body not as a corporeal object, but as a symbolic value:

Reconceptualizing the body as a cultural construction makes it possible to look at how sport 'travels' across boundaries and opens up a space for examining how sport creates connections between peoples at the same time it strengthens local and national identities. (Besnier & Brownell 2012: 454)

The body of the athlete is required to reproduce not only specific athletic acts, but also to serve as a touchstone of culture. In the Olympics, more than in any other global event, athletes are asked to embody and reproduce the consciousness of their nations. Attributes of athletes' bodies, including their race, sexuality, and, with particular focus, gender, take on greater significance as heightened attention is drawn to nations and their interaction.

The tension between male and female roles in the grand rehearsal of nationhood is historically visible in sports. As women are called upon to protect the spiritual conceptualization of nation and in turn pass it on to their children, the day-to-day practical national leadership and hard power is viewed as the domain of men. This dichotomy, which holds "women as metaphor and man as individualized agent," demarcates the interaction between these two linked strands of nationalism (Goscilo & Lanoux 2006: 3). Women are relegated to the defense and reproduction of cultural memories, and men are called upon for the literal defense of culture. While women support the spiritual 'nation,' the male role is located within the Russian state:

the state is associated with historical temporality and events, the code of law, Empire, and the great men (Karamzin, Solov'ev, Speranskii- i.e., the historians and statemen) who gave it form, all under the aegis of 'the Russian Empire.' By contrast, the nation is of mysterious origins, located outside historical time, and characterized by the amorphous, sacred, essential, life-giving force that is 'Mother Russia.' (Goscilo & Lanoux 2006: 4)

These roles are opposite halves of the nation state; while the male role is fundamentally tangible, the female role is intangible. In most sports, which are concerned with displays of strength and corporeal capabilities, men receive the overwhelming majority of attention.

Linguistic and traditional barriers in Russia complicate discussion of gender. As Rosalind Marsh writes, related words in native Russian, such as *pol*, cannot convey the

“class, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, age, and other forms of identity” associated with the term *gender*. While Russian scholars have adopted the foreign term *gender*, the daily language has not absorbed this term, and its use has been derided as an example of scholars’ imitation of Westerners (Marsh 2013: 189). In this document, gender will be accepted, like national identity, as a performed construct, represented by individuals and interpreted by society.

Athletes are primarily remarkable for their physical acumen, but by and large conform to society’s preconceived standards. This normative quality is not constructed by athletes, but by culture. In the attempt to redeem a narrative of masculine identity, those who do not conform to majority notions of race and sexuality are excluded. Sport reinforces societal norms, including gender: “through space and ritual, a distinctive, defensive yet celebratory mode of being male” (Whannel 2008: 191). The conventionalism of sport has two primary impetuses: one practical, and the other cultural. The first is the need to suppress indications of sexuality, because sport involves the assessment of young male and female bodies. According to Whannel, the intrusion of overt sexuality would destabilize the spectacle of sport: “So there is invariably a tension at work between the erotic potential of the performance and the enervating properties of the commentary” (Whannel 2008: 196). The second factor is the fundamentally performative nature of sport, as a force in the formation of nation states and cultural context.

The discussion about gay rights surrounding the Sochi Olympics demonstrates the ability of sport to both reinforce social constructs and to provide a forum for dialogue.

Historically, gay and lesbian athletes have been treated with a particularly potent brand of hostility. In 1983, Whannel noted that sports had

the greatest difficulties in even acknowledging gay and lesbian existence....very few elite sports performers in major sports have felt able to come out as gay; indeed the suggestion of gayness, almost invariably couched as if it were the worst imaginable slur, is taken within macho sport cultures as a deadly insult (2008: 191-192).

In an environment of extreme masculinity, there is no room for views in opposition to the master narrative. Hyper masculine, and hyper nationalist, sentiment grew in Russia during the catastrophic years after the fall of the Soviet Union. It is widely noted that male subcultures grew in response to a perceived “feminization” of society, in which the Russian nation seemed to lose its figurative potency. As economic, political, and social structures failed, the birth rate declined, and large numbers of Russian women entered the global sex trade, these forces seemed to “imply that Russian men cannot impregnate, protect, or economically sustain their own women” (Goscilo & Lanoux 2006: 21). Male fandom became a mode for the expression of their collective agency, while female fandom appeared to indicate the nation’s descent: “while male fans dissipate masculine aggression in a ‘pack’ or ‘crowd’ context via fandom, female fans are pathological individuals whose behavior symbolizes the ‘fall’ of society and culture in the modern age” (Pilkington 1996: 198). As Russian masculinity appeared to come under assault, male culture became more self conscious and defensive. Whannel acknowledges the destructive potential of utilizing sport as an diffuser for masculine energy: “So if sports cultures are machines for producing heterosexual masculinity, they are machines that end to turn out a warped, fearful, repressed and homophobic masculinity” (Whannel 2008: 192). Sports allow men to redefine and reassert their masculinity.



It is necessary to note that sport is not by necessity a vehicle for preexisting social constructs, but also as an opportunity to express opposing views to a wider audience. Despite sport's normative impulses, Besnier and Brownell also point out that sports can also be a forum for resistance, as the raised fists of Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics illustrated (2012: 450). The Sochi Olympics certainly provided a forum for international community to express distaste for Russian discrimination against gays, launching global protests. In part to circumvent rules prohibiting athletes from protesting, gay rights groups encouraged the propagation of the symbol "P6," a reference to Proposition 6 of the Olympic Charter. Brian Healey of the group Athlete Ally stated: "In advocating for the upholding of the Olympic Charter itself, in don't think a political statement is necessarily being made and that it is violating any other rules of the Olympic Charter" (Bigg 5 Feb. 2014).

Across nations, physicality and militarism characterize masculine national identity. Among the Asian and Northern European nations observed by Ida Blom, feminine identities in relation to the nation varied, but masculine identities remained consistent: "masculinity as a key to public rights and obligations in the nation..." (2000). Newspapers Stern monitored in the United Kingdom, "More predictably, men were the focus of 86% of the articles, 95% of which also happened to be written by them" (216). The masculine role is clearly oriented for the literal defense of the nation: "Above all, it is men who are expected to answer the state's ultimate call to arms; they are the ones who will pursue to conduct of the war, shooting and being shot, raping, but not being raped, in the cause of the homeland" (Billig 1995: 123). Masculine national identity is understood

as a physical burden that must be protected from corporeal threats. Sports permit men to rehearse aggressive nationalism in relatively non-violent war games.

The lexicon of the military permeates that used to discuss sport. Media coverage of sports constantly reinforces the relationship between sport and the nation. Sports are constantly likened to battles, and equipment to weapons. Balls are “shot,” opponents “defeated” or “struck down” by winners’ “attacks.” These reminders occur so consistently that they normally escape the attention of the average reader; such terminology assumes a sense of inevitability and naturalness: “Day after day, millions of men seek their pleasures on these pages, admiring heroism in the national cause, enjoying prose which intertextually echoes warfare. Sure pleasures cannot be innocent” (Billig 1995: 125). Although sports are viewed as a straightforward “pastimes,” they may have a serious impact on the national psyche.

Despite the Soviet government’s professed desire to use athletic to increase equality between the sexes, sports took a predominantly masculine lilt during times of military action. As various sectors of society rapidly militarized, traditional gender roles solidified to support a social structure in crisis. In Soviet propaganda posters, when the author intended to indicate strength, the protagonist would almost always be male:

If it was unified strength resisting the enemy or hardships... then its marker was male, without doubt. Here, power and strength were immanent in this unity. But if we are dealing with “the people” led by the party, then the marker was more likely female. (Pospelova 2010: 49)

This trend was particularly visible in schools, which emphasized daily military-like drills. The state depended upon sports clubs to provide the next generation of soldiers (Riordan 1980). Government and society reinforced traditional gender roles. Leisure time set aside, sport’s association with military exercise intensified. Although the gendering and

accompanying militarization of sports expanded during times of war, the consequences of this association lasted after ceasefire. Soviet sports spectators and participants were also overwhelmingly male during peacetime (Riordan 1980). The state favored men's soccer and wrestling over the women's (Riordan 1980: 7). Men are called upon to defend their nation's honor in sport as they might one day defend the nation at war. Sports fans wave the flag of their city or nation, declaring their allegiance to a particular group. In watching their team's successes and failures with friends, family and strangers, fans become emotionally invested both in their team and in the community. While ostensibly purely for entertainment, newspapers' sports sections cater to the male impulse to reinforce military nationalism. Although other portions of the paper appear to be more 'important,' the sports section most closely mirrors the battlefield experience:

On foreign fields, the men win their trophies, or lose their honour, doing battle on the nation's behalf. The readers, mainly men, are invited to see these male exploits in terms of the whole homeland, and, thus, men's concerns are presented as if defining the whole national honour. (Billig 1995: 123)

Identification with teams is powerful because it operates both on a micro and meta level of communal attachment. Team athletes struggle not only for their personal glory, but for their teammates, for their fans, and for their nation.

In Russia, as in other countries, fandom functions, in part, as opportunity to construct and express masculine identity. Although the bodily man-to-man struggle of athletes may seem to more closely mirror military struggle, fandom has much in common with the behavior of members of a nation during wartime. Fandom serves as an exercise in loyalty. As men are designated to support a side of a war, they are similarly assigned to a particular team. In both instances, their "side" is typically selected and reinforced on the basis of physical location and personal loyalties, which must then be defended from an

enemy, despite circumstances largely out of their control. They must blindly follow events determined by others, and offer their support. Although the soldier cannot change the course of the war, and the fan cannot impact the outcome of a game, the soldier and the sports-fan must form and support smaller communities, on which they can have immediate impact.

Russian conceptions of fandom are especially gendered; the Russian words for male and female fandom connote very different experiences. Whereas the male “fanat” expresses himself through communal, physical action, the female “fanatka” operates alone on an intangible, emotional plane. Women are defined by their personal and sexualized adoration; men share brotherly love with their comrades:

In the Soviet media, these ‘types’ are clearly gendered, however: the male fan (*fanat*) is a plural phenomenon taking the form of either football fans who act in a crowd, are aggressive and sometimes violent, or hard rock fans (*metallisty* or *rokery*) whose frenzied crowd behavior defines them; while the feminine form (*fanatka*) is a singular concept and denotes, as a rule, a young woman in love with a male rock star whose behavior is portrayed as morally degenerate and egoistic (Pilkington 1996: 198)

Men and women are not permitted the same form of obsession. The male crowd can absorb some responsibility for the fanat, but the fanatka is an isolated figure. Whereas the fanat is met with toleration, and even encouragement, the fanatka is viewed with wariness, as if it were fundamentally unhealthy.

Male fandom is viewed as an appropriate release for the male tendency for destructive behavior. This facet of gender identity took shape during pre-revolutionary times. Normal male youth was conceived as a wild stage of life; within limits, sexual and physical acting out was viewed as a forgivable consequence of this process (Pilkington 1996). According to Pospelova, “men represent the highest achievements, but also social

vices” (2010: 50). The quintessential Russian man is defined by “excessiveness” and “impulsiveness,” in terms of alcohol use, sexual appetite, physical aggression, and spiritual identity (Pospelova 2010). Athletics appeal to a masculine sensibility of nationalism, permitting men to express militarism in a controlled environment: “If sport is a sublimation, then the flag-waving is a safety-valve, draining away masculine, aggressive energies and making the world a more peaceable place...” (Billig 1995: 123). Women are not permitted the same form of release as men.

### *3.3 Message of the Games*

The Russian state infused the Sochi Games with hallmarks of traditional Olympic values, attempting to lend an aura of legitimacy to the modern Russian nation in conjunction with the state’s needs. In a pragmatic ritual of marketing an official vision of nationalism to the world, Russia created a spectacle of its nation on the plane of utopian internationalist display. The Sochi games were intended to present Russia to the Russian people as secure and united, a modern, highly capable “normalized power,” well-governed by the control of a single emblematic leader (Makaryevich 2013). Paradoxically, while the Games are continuously proclaimed to be apolitical, and a unique opportunity for the nations of the world to set aside their differences and celebrate shared humanity, the Olympics cannot be held as separate from the political initiatives of the states that fund and orchestrate them.

For nations asserting themselves on the international stage, demonstrations of global “soft power” are essential for their image in both foreign and domestic eyes. The word “power” typically connotes the notion of “hard” power: military and physical force,

and the perception of these capabilities. Soft power refers to a state's ability to influence global culture. According to Joseph Nye, soft culture allows states to influence the beliefs and behavior of other nations: "Of course, there is an element of triviality and fad in popular behavior, but it is also true that a country that stands astride popular channels of communication has more opportunities to get its messages across and to effect the preferences of others" (Nye 1990: 169). The Olympics are clearly primarily the domain of soft power; states construct a positive narrative of their nation's cultural accomplishments to present to the world. In the words of Lincoln Allison, although the Olympics are conceived as an international cosmopolitan spectacle, the soft power states seek is a "demonstration of foreign acquiescence. Thus, one of the fairest and most common accusations put against the Games is their 'moral bankruptcy' or 'ideological promiscuity'" (Allison 2005: 93). In the course of the Games' history, the Olympics have promoted capitalist, fascist, and communist governments.

Official initiatives to mold narratives about the Olympics benefit from the Games' historically reiterated idealistic values. According to Emil Persson, the "Olympic myth," or ideal system of discourse in the modern Olympics, is essentially divided into five pillars (2013). The first is the principle of Humanism: the concept of the common good, of human dignity. The Olympics seem to place different races, religions, on an equal plane; if they can have the skills, athletes are given an outwardly equal opportunity to compete. The next Olympic value is that of Universalism, primarily centered on universal ethical principles. Exactly what these ethical principles are remains largely indistinctly defined, except for claims to peacefulness and cooperation. In practical terms, the most common ethical demands placed upon nations are that all nations are expected to respect

the rules of the International Olympic Committee and of their sport. Another Olympic value is Internationalism. The etymology of the word “international” confirms that this concept simultaneously encourages people to turn outward, to the entire globe, and also to recognize themselves as members of a particular nation. This concept is both modern and its global focus, and conservative in reaffirming the status quo of a world composed of nations. The final two Olympic values, Modernism and Rationalism, are often entwined. Since the Enlightenment, a dominating global idea has been that human progress and logic can conquer the world’s problems. The Olympics embody the idea that human organization and effort can accomplish great feats. Both the athletes’ athletic prowess and the display of the Olympics seem to confirm these values. If only the world were able to set aside their differences, the Games seem to posit, as they do in the Olympics, the globe would be a better place. The idea that the Olympics exist independent of ordinary politics is an overt falsehood. The Olympics are seldom a true hiatus on discord, and typically encourage politicized discussions in the international press. By hosting the Games, states display their professed support for these values, and inherit the Games’ moral high ground.

The Olympic ideology originates within an intellectual context that both professed globalist values and affirmed a global map as demarcated by nations. This seemingly contradictory dual function is reflected in the beliefs of the founder of the modern Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin. To Coubertin, the Olympics were a way of addressing the increasingly nationalistic movements in Europe, which dominated international politics. Pierre de Coubertin believed the Olympics were an opportunity to infuse the masses with a greater cultural understanding of the world. Pierre de Coubertin

advocated a paternalistic drive to cultivate the ignorant audience through the Olympics, saying: the “modern masses are more and more lacking in gentlemanly feelings...they all need to be re-educated from scratch. They need to be taught how to appreciate a beautiful sporting exploit and how offensive nationalisms that give our era a tinge of semi-barbarism are displaced” (Geoffroy de Navacelle de Coubertin 1996). Despite these nationalist trends, he believed that the Olympics could confer the “genius of each people” and encourage greater mutual understanding across boundaries (Geoffroy de Navacelle de Coubertin 1996). At the same time, values asserting particular universal truths may be used to justify the actions of those claiming to uphold them, including those who would use them “to justify colonial ambitions... Olympism as well as imperialism are expansionist ideas: those who have seen the light shall bring it to those who have not” (Persson 2013: 89).

The Sochi Olympics were used in part to show Russian support for values typically identified with Western nations. In investing in event that promotes the Olympic values, Russia professed its endorsement of international ideals: “The event will show the world that Russia is a country which respects human rights and the intrinsic value of every person” (Persson 2013: 79). The Olympic values seem to be surprisingly reconcilable with those V.V. Alekseev claims the Russian state ought to aspire to: security and stability, and identity and fairness (2013: 20). These values are important not only in terms of ideology, but also for the practical running of a successful Olympics. None of these values necessitate freedoms of expression. The ideas of “security and stability” are simple enough to trace; according to Emil Persson, the terroristic threat to the Games allowed Russia to frame itself against a common enemy for both Russia and



all nations participating to the Games (2013). On the Olympic website, terrorism is represented as a “danger to humanity as a whole,” which invites extraordinary means for its defeat, including the dramatic ramping up of security and even the restriction of human rights (Persson 2013: 79). The values of identity and fairness may appear to run contrary to official state prerogatives, but remain logical if one considers that they are defined by the state. As was already noted, the Olympics are permissive of imperialism, and are easily oriented to promote the propagation of official nationhood and cultural tyranny. V.V. Alekseev argued that although it is important for Russia to conform to internationalist values, it must also remain true to its national blueprint: “It is imperative to use world experience in conditions of globalization, but it must be skillfully meshed with national traditions. Otherwise, modernization processes become stuck, and that is what is taking place in Russia” (2013: 25).

Russia also attempted to display its capabilities both by excelling in athletics and by creating impressive Olympic venues and displays. Although the cost of the Games, over \$50 billion, was dramatically above the original allocated sum, it reveals the state’s willingness to sacrifice to create an impressive show. Andrei Markov, director of the biathlon venue at Sochi, brushed off questions about the cost of the Games by saying: “What kind of financial difficulty can there be, if the president has given his guarantee?” (Yaffa 2014). The Games were promised, and therefore concerns for cost were secondary. The scale and ambition of the project was meant to reflect the scale and ambition of Russia on the international stage. Even the location of the Games served to prove Russia’s technical capabilities:

Putin built a vast Olympic Park on swampy land- an echo of Peter the Great’s building his grand westward-looking city on the swamps of the Neva River-

precisely because of the daring it involved. ‘We need to understand and feel that we are capable of pulling off major large-scale projects,’ Putin said (Remnick 2014: 32)

The venues, and the Sochi Games themselves, were literally something created from nothing. Elaborate Olympic venues were a tangible reminder of the Russian ability to promise something, and deliver it.

Throughout modern history, sports mega-events, including World Cups, have been used by the host nations to announce their nation’s arrival amongst the ranks of modern nations. These states typically prove their modernity by situating the Games within their nation’s history. In 1896 Greece, this meant reclaiming its classical past, while for 1930 Uruguay, a celebration of the anniversary of its independence (Tomlinson & Young 2006: 5). In recent years, the nation that most obviously announced its arrival by hosting the Olympics is China. Wing-Wah Law argues that during the 2008 Beijing Games, the Chinese state used the Olympics to create for its citizens a more nuanced vision of themselves as citizens, instilling them “with a sense of being a host, both at the national and local levels (‘we’), to receive guests from the rest of the world (‘they’)” (2010). Hosts of the Olympic Games define their nations as unique within their own right, and in relation to all other nations.

Encouraging sheer national pride is often considered to be one of the desirable benefits of nations investing in sports and sporting mega events. Sport is a beneficial conductor of national identity, in part, because its victories are straightforward; one man defeats another. It embodies the struggle between nations, without the true bloodshed of war or the complexities of ideology. In supporting one team, the audience must wish the failure of another. Although it is always observed through the lens of national and

political circumstances, the choice sport posits leaves no room for dispute: you're either with us or against us. According to Ivo van Hilvoorde, Agnes Elling and Ruud Stovkis, national investment in sport in the Netherlands has been justified by claims that successful sportsmen will encourage "national cohesion, pride and international prestige" (2010: 8).

The Sochi Olympics had the potential to function both as a reminder of Russia's return as a potent global influence, and to reassure the population of the country's continued upward trend. In Putin's words, there were also "moral" reasons for locating the Olympics in Sochi: "After the collapse of the USSR and the difficult and bloody events in the Caucasus, the general state of society is one of dejection and pessimism. We need to cheer up" ("Putin Sees 'Moral' Movement for Russia in Winter Olympics:" 17 Jan. 2014). Putin viewed the Olympics, in part, as a way of rectifying historical wrongs. Remnick argues that Putin advocated the "creation of an alternative past," pointing to a 2007 speech, in which Putin claimed that Russia had "nothing to be ashamed of," and to a Kremlin-backed textbook, which states: "The Soviet Union was not a democracy, but it was an example around the world of the best and fairest society" (2014: 34). In situating the Games in the Caucasus, Russia was able to write a triumphant conclusion to a difficult history. At the same time, the Olympic games presented an opportunity to divert national attention. Sports victories permit Russia to reclaim a portion of the narrative surrendered at the fall of the Soviet Union:

When Russia was victorious in the final match of the World Hockey Championship, the commentators on the Rossiia TV channel went on and on about how we had returned to the wonderful era of the Soviet Union and victorious Soviet sports. They made much of the fact that all of the hockey players on the Russian all-star team had been born in the Soviet Union. (Borusiak 2009: 62)

Despite the end of Soviet Power, Soviet victories that are not dependent on the state can be incorporated into the Russian national narrative.

While President Vladimir Putin retains broad popularity, his regime faces mounting political and economic challenges. Putin is currently in his third presidential term, and must work harder to assure the public of the state's course. In 2011 and 2012, after it became clear he would replace Dmitri Medvedev as president, a series of urban protests against him took place. Economic concerns also became a potential threat to Putin's presidency. Much popular support for Putin depends upon the massive economic recovery that took place during Putin's regime. However, Stephen Sestanovich notes that Russian economic growth has slowed, but that inflation remains at 6-7% (2014). Most Western-trained experts agree upon what needs to be done, but their recommendations require the rolling back of state control: "Russia needs market-based solutions that allow more small- and medium-sized businesses to form, reduce the size and power of state corporations, lighten the burden of corruption, and encourage both foreign and domestic investment" (Sestanovich 2014). Such changes would increase transparency and make Russia more business-friendly, but also undermine the set Russian power structure. For Putin, the Olympics offered the opportunity not only to promote Russia's strengths, but to show the continued capabilities of his leadership: "the Sochi Winter Games may actually prove to be amongst his last chances to show strength and resolve and demonstrate that his is the strong hand at the helm which according to widespread popular sentiments Russia dearly needs" (Pettersson & Vamling 2013: 5). By demonstrating Russia's strength, Putin attempted to demonstrate his own capabilities.

The Sochi Winter Olympic games were often described as Vladimir Putin's pet project; he was central to the decision to make the enormous technical and economic investment in the games. Hosting the Olympics provided an opportunity to display both the continued strength of Putin's presidency, and the rebounding strength of the Russian state. To Putin, a strong leader is necessary to prevent a return to the chaos of the Yeltsin years (Herspring). According to Herspring, two overarching themes emerge in Putin's leadership style: pragmatism and statism:

Putin....appeared thoughtful and methodical.... [His style was also administrative, in that he expected the bureaucracy to implement his mandates, and his decisions tended to be of the gradual, incremental type that one would expect from someone who spent his life in a bureaucratic organization like the KGB.... If Putin's character contains an 'ism,' it would be a statism that, like nationalism, embraces a deep seated desire to restore Russia to the greatness of its Soviet years...(155-157).

Understanding of these characteristics helps to explain Putin's drive to dispense billions of dollars in pursuit of what is primarily a spectacle of national capabilities, the Olympics. Putin recognized that it is necessary to articulate the power of both a nation and its leader.

No other contemporary figure invokes the visual symbolism of Russian masculinity as blatantly as Putin. These images are largely hyper-masculine, to the point of absurdity. Putin, often standing alone, is shown:

...flying a Tupolev Tu-160 (Blackjack) strategic bomber to test a new conventional cruise missile, in 2005; shooting a Siberian tiger with a tranquilizer gun in the Ussuri Reserve in the Russian Far East, in 2009; test driving a Renault Formula One car, in 2010; taking part in an archaeological excavation of an ancient Greek port on the Taman Peninsula, in 2011; attempting to bend a frying pan with his bare hands during a visit to the summer camp of the pro-Kremlin youth group 'Nashi' at Lake Seliger, in 2011; and riding a three-wheeled Harley-Davidson with motorcycle enthusiasts during a bike festival in the southern Russian city of Novorossiisk, in 2011 (Foxall 2012: 137)

In a series of pictures, Putin's masculine body in action becomes a theme within itself, creating an association between Putin as an abstract leader and Putin as a physical human male: "...Putin's body serves as an object that participates in the construction of difference between one type of person (a strong leader, giving orders and always in charge) and another (somebody who follows orders and is willing to be pushed around)" (Foxall 2012: 144). Putin reveals himself as a Russian "James Bond," who portrays himself to be a fundamentally masculine figure worthy of admiration and respect (Foxall 2012). Putin's history as a former member of the secret service and an accomplished martial artist deepens this connection. Several times during his presidency, Putin's administration published potent images of Putin taking part in physical activities. The symbol of "Putin the man" has long been closely associated with acumen as a sportsman. Through these photographs, Putin constructs an image to accompany the political actions he takes as president, of a man capable of taking charge with his own hands. Although these images are constructed in part for their shock value, Putin draws upon a long Soviet and Russian legacy of depicting a virile leader.

The Sochi Olympics allowed Putin to show that both he and the Russian state are capable of tangible accomplishments, with a government that is both strong and effective. To those who met Putin during his time as chairman of Leningrad's foreign relations committee, he seemed a "man who could get things done," a "doer" (Herspring 2009: 153). In locating the 2014 Russian Olympic games in the Caucasus, Putin displays his masculine ability to conquer the territory of Russia. Images of Putin frequently appeal to the theme of the Russian wild:

Russia's rugged landscape, far from being a passive part of the photographs, is integral to the messages that the photographs of Putin convey.... [they] establish

emotional investment in a stereotypical landscape of the nation, and use imagery of an iconic Russia to foster a feeling of nationalism that is, to echo the words of Eichler, inexcusably masculine. Because the Far East is so iconic for the Russian imagination, the photographs of Putin have particular significance for Russians seeking to interpret world events through a geopolitical script. (Foxall 2012: 142)

In these photographs Putin is shown encountering rough territory and physical challenges, displaying a form of ‘frontier masculinity’; his capacity to physically conquer the terrain shows his ability to do so politically (Foxall 2012). The Caucasus region has served to remind the world of political uncertainty and social upheaval. If the Caucasus serve as a backdrop for the physical display of the Olympic games, Putin can showcase the state’s ability to maintain order in the region.

Billig concludes that the politicization of sport “ensures that the former is not merely a symbolic replacement for the latter” (Billig 1995: 123). Putin’s participation in sport shows that he is physically prepared to defend his homeland. The masculine sexuality and militarism of these images are meant to draw a connection between these values and leadership. It is noteworthy that several of these images were published during the military conflict with Georgia, while Putin was attending the Beijing Olympic Games. Putin has remained relatively popular in Russia throughout his presidency. In November 1999, his approval stood at 80%, and it has not fallen below 40% (Foxall 2012). This register shot up to 84% when he stepped down from the presidency, and upon his reelection remained at 54% (Foxall 2012: 136). However, Putin has ruled for a decade, and faced challenges to his rule from citizens from both in the Caucasus and in Moscow. The Olympic games may allow Putin to convince the world and his nation of his continued personal strength.

## CHAPTER 4

### RUSSIANS AT THE GAMES

During the Sochi Olympics, the efforts of Russian athletes were framed as directly representative of the Russian nation. Different sports were shown to indicate particular facets of Russians' capabilities. Men's hockey appeared to hold particular weight for the Russian conception of strength, whereas women's hockey was virtually ignored in the press. The Russian team's failure to win a medal reverberated throughout the Russian media, proving to be the chief collective trauma of the Games, evoking an near physical reaction of pain. Figure skating success served as a boon to the Russian ego, but appears to have been connected less to notions of hard power.

#### 4.1 *Hockey*

Failure can be as powerful or even more powerful a collective emotional experience for the nation as success. Despite the plethora of medals it earned in the Olympics, Russia's inability to succeed in men's hockey was viewed as the worst possible failure. Despite high expectations, Russian men's hockey was defeated first by the American and then the Finnish teams, ultimately finishing in fifth place. NTV reported that the Minister of Sports declared, "Failure in hockey should not negate the results, which other athletes exhibit in other sports."<sup>8</sup> For Russians, hockey is the ultimate embodiment of Russian athleticism, and this failure a stain on the sport's legacy.

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<sup>8</sup> "Ministr sporta prizyvayet ne rugat khokkeistov za neudachu na Olimpiada." *Olimpiada v Sochi // NTV.Ru*. N.p. 21 Feb. 2014. Web. 30 Mar. 2014.



Despite their differences, Russian news organizations Novaya Gazeta, Sport.ru, and NTV all framed the failure in terms of pain: a wound to the national psyche. Hockey failure is an affront to a component of the Russian nation's masculinity and strength. If hockey players cannot protect the nation's honor, who can? These publications implicate their readers in the action, including the implied audience of Russians in the emotional experience of suffering. This failure, according to Sport.ru, reflected societal issues more serious than hockey; it equated the hockey team's loss with greater societal issues: "[the hockey team] reflects the approach we have applied everywhere in our country."<sup>9</sup>

Of all sports, hockey appears to most embody Russian masculinity and strength. Women's hockey received significantly less coverage than men's, and men's hockey is never referred to as men's, but simply as "Russian hockey." Yuri Rost of Novaya Gazeta compared women's hockey to men's makeup, describing both as seemingly unnatural; however, he noted that he wanted to see the state win "even in women's hockey."<sup>10</sup> A Sport.ru article said that in the case of hockey, "fans with experience will certainly be allowed male tears," suggesting that there is something about hockey in particular that touches men's emotions.<sup>11</sup> A NTV article directly appealed to hyper-masculine, militaristic values; it was titled "Russia's Hockey Fans Wait for Real War in Match with Finland" quoted the forward Aleksander Ovechkin as stating, "In tomorrow's quarterfinal match with Finns at the Olympics in Sochi the Russian hockey players will battle not for

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<sup>9</sup> Danilov, Alexei. "Proval sbornoi kak zerkalo rossiskovo bitiya." Sport.ru. N.p., 21 Feb. 2014. Web. 07 Apr. 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Rost, Yuri. "Okh, Shto ya videl!" *Novaya Gazeta*. N.p., 11 Feb. 2014. Web. 7 Apr. 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Khemy, Vitaly. "7 главных ожиданий от хоккейного турнира." *Sport.ru*. N.p., 12 Feb. 2014. Web. 06 Apr. 2014.

life, but to the death.”<sup>12</sup> This article depicted the sport as a “battle” between men defending their country’s honor.

For the Russian media, failure in international hockey is nothing short of a deeply effecting emotional blow. An NTV article’s title refers to the “anguish” of the American team’s failure to earn a hockey medal.<sup>13</sup> These articles take their audience’s agreement for granted; how else, they imply, could one react to such a spectacle? A Sport.ru article notes that the events are “unlikely to cause any neutral emotions,” and that it will take time to overcome “such lesions.”<sup>14</sup> Novaya Gazeta articles are particularly expressive in describing the suffering invoked by viewing the games. A Novaya Gazeta Article uses the word *dusha*, or soul, to describe the pain of the event; hockey is not merely a game, but penetrates in to the core of Russian being: “This day into the evening took soul.”<sup>15</sup> Russian souls experience the greatest suffering, but they also possess the greatest capacity to endure spiritual pain. The game incorporated into a narrative of Russian suffering; since “hockey was the focus of hopes,” for the Russian audience, “the initial shock was replaced by hopeless longing.”<sup>15</sup>

The results are presented as tainting a longer legacy. Success or failure at the Olympics is not a self-contained event, but is incorporated into the history of Russian sport. A NTV article titled “The Russian Hockey Players Demonstrated the Worst Result

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<sup>12</sup> “*Sbornuyu Rossi po khokeiyu zhdyet nastoyashaya voina v matche s finnami.*” *Olimpiada v Sochi // NTV.Ru*. NTV, 18 Feb. 2014. Web. 30 Mar. 2014.

<sup>13</sup> “Kakaya boll: amerikanskiye khokkeisti uezhaiyut iz Sochi bez medali.” *Olimpiada v Sochi // NTV.Ru*. N.p., 22 Feb. 2014. Web. 30 Mar. 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Proskurin, Dmitri. “Rossiya- Finlandia. Pamyatka k Pkhyochkhanu.” *Sport.ru*. N.p., 19 Feb. 2014. Web. 02 Apr. 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Mozgovoy, Vladimir. “Ne mnoga tragady v ‘Bolshom.’” *Novaya Gazeta*, 20 Feb. 2014. Web. 01 Apr. 2014.

in the Last Six Olympics” showed that the game was no ordinary failure, but cast shame onto the entire legacy of Russian hockey.<sup>16</sup> Vladimir Mozgovoy laments the last four years since the defeat at the Vancouver Olympics as having also been filled with pain.<sup>17</sup> Not all of these articles are entirely negative. Novaya Gazeta article looks to the future for solace and inspiration: “Time heals all wounds, hope lives. With that we remain on the threshold of new purpose.”<sup>18</sup> Sport.ru referred to the defeat by the US as “Déjà vu,” and expressed the need to reclaim Russia’s dignity from Finland: “That day will come, when [Finland] needs to pay.”<sup>9</sup>

After failing to achieve a hockey medal, media attention immediately shifted to parceling out responsibility. The hockey players seem to feel a great deal of shame, and a sense of responsibility beyond their personal success. Discourse about the player Evgeni Malkin implied that Malkin failed not only himself, but his homeland: “For Malkin the Winter Olympics in Russia, where they are crazy about hockey, was to be the high point of his career, but turned into a bitter disappointment”...“Malkin said, that his deep love for the homeland would not disappear, even if he ceased to be a symbol of Russian hockey.”<sup>19</sup> The majority of blame appears to have gone to the coach, Zinetula Bilyaletdinov, who apologized for his failure to deliver success. NTV reported that Vladislav Tretyak the President of Ice Hockey Federation of Russia, who was also the general manager of the Russian 2010 Olympic team, demanded that Bilyaletdinov must

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<sup>16</sup> “Rossisskii khokkeisti pokazali khudsii rezultat za poslednie shest Olimpiad.” *Olimpiada v Sochi // NTV.Ru*. NTV, 19 Feb. 2014. Web. 30 Mar. 2014.

<sup>17</sup> “Vladislav Tretyak: Bilyaletdinov dolzhen obyasnit, v chem evo vina.” *Olimpiada v Sochi // NTV.Ru*. N.p. 20 Feb. 2014. Web. 30 Mar. 2014

<sup>18</sup> Rost, Yuri. “V poiskakh radosti.” *Novaya Gazeta*. N.p., 20 Feb. 2014. Web. 31 Mar. 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Novokshenov, Kirill. “Dvoye protiv vetra. Pochemu Bilyaletdinov vinovat v provalye Malkina i Ovechkina v Sochi.” *Sports.ru*. N.p., 27 Feb. 2014. Web. 31 Mar. 2014.

explain his guilt.<sup>17</sup> After Bilyaletdinov resigned, and said that he would not have changed anything about the Olympics preparations, Novaya Gazeta said it was a “strange statement.”<sup>15</sup> These articles seem to show that the hockey team not only let down the entire Russian nation, but insulted its sense of pride. Russian hockey failure was framed as largely inexcusable; it appeared necessary for a leader to be held accountable.

#### *4.2 Figure Skating*

Amongst other Winter Olympic sports, figure skating is particularly well suited to television. It is both visually striking and typically centered around the competition of individuals and pairs. The television camera focuses on the movements and expressions of one or two bodies or faces, allowing the audience to become intimately acquainted with the skaters. The audience is invited to observe previously unknown bodies, and to come to know the people they observe on an almost personal level: “Where Hollywood generated a star system, the more intimate, domestic and face-centred medium of television developed a personality system” (Whannel 2008: 188). This one-sided relationship encourages the formation of skaters as symbols for their nations, who stand alone on the ice to represent their entire people. Despite the extreme physical strength required of skater, however, skating stands apart from overtly militaristic sports such as hockey. Terminology used to describe figure skating typically emphasizes strength of will and artistry versus pure physical brawn. At the same time, the press attempts to reconcile image of skaters with national expectations for each gender. Russian skaters are depicted in terms of personal qualities such as dedication to their work and overall sense

of discipline. From this background, figure skaters emerge as heroes of a particular facet of Russian identity. Skaters are expected to represent both the beauty and the strength of Russian culture.

Overall, Russia was very successful in figure skating events during the Sochi 2014 Olympics. A *Novaya Gazeta* article noted that Russian skating had come far from the last few Olympics, noting that the Turin Olympics had seemed to feature the “last fruit of the Soviet school,” but now, at Sochi, the “iceberg began to melt.”<sup>20</sup> The Russian skaters received the first gold medal of the games for a new event, the Team Ice Dance. Elena Ilinykh and Nikita Katsalapov received a bronze for Ice Dancing; Adelina Sotnikova won gold in Ladies Skating; Maxim Trankov and Tatiana Volosozhar won gold for Pairs, with Fedor Klimov and Ksenia Stolbova taking the silver. Certain personages emerged as particularly important players in news coverage. Yulia Lipnitskaya, a fifteen-year-old who barely made the cut off for the Olympics’ age requirement, was depicted as the hero of the team skating victory, although she did not medal in the Ladies’ competition after falling. Evgeni Plushenko, a well-established male figure skater, dropped out after the team competition due to health complications, and announced his retirement from skating. Adelina Sotnikova, while initially overshadowed by Lipnitskaya, received attention after defeating the South Korean favorite Yuna Kim. Maxim Trankov and Tatiana Volosozhar earned a world record for the highest combined pairs score.

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<sup>20</sup> Uspenski, Andrei. “Aisberg rasatayal.” *Novaya Gazeta*. N.p., 14 Feb. 2014. Web. 7 Apr. 2014.

Much of the dialogue in the Russian press seems to liken figure skating more to an artistic endeavor than an athletic feat. Alexei Polikovski of *Novaya Gazeta* referred to it as the “most beautiful sport.”<sup>21</sup> Figure skating has long roots in Russian culture. Russian coach Tamara Moskvina was quoted as saying: “It’s important because it is not an individual event but a team event, and it brings joy to the whole country... figure skating is our tradition. It combines technique and art, and Russia has great tradition in those fields” (Longman 2014). A common complaint about contemporary figure skating competition is the growing preference for stunts with high point values over artistry. A Sport.ru author lamented the “sad, thought-out era” that could lead to the loss of what makes skating beautiful.<sup>22</sup> Skating, this article implies, ought to be based on artistry, not on the accumulation of points.

As a sport that demands its players to be strong but look beautiful, figure skating presents certain challenges for traditional gender roles. Sport.ru recalled a memorable past performance in which a female skater embodied the “Eastern beauty telling tales to her husband, seeming feminine, bright and charismatic.”<sup>22</sup> When female members of the nation are described, they are typically shown to be defenders of “soft” culture who preserve traditions, whereas the male members of the nation are called upon for leadership and for bodily action. Some scholars, such as Abigail Feder, argue that female skaters are asked to compensate for showing strength by overemphasizing their femininity: “Figure skating’s “apology” is actually incorporated into the competition,

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<sup>21</sup> Polikovski, Alexei. “Aristokrat.” *Novaya Gazeta*. N.p., 14 Feb. 2014. Web. 7 Apr. 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Petrukhina, Anastasiya. “Figurnoye kataniye. Svobodnaya vakansiya.” *Sport.ru*. 18 Feb. 2014. Web. 7 Feb. 2014.

where costume, makeup, and gesture feminize and soften the athletic prowess required for executing triple jumps and flying sit-spins” (1994). Although men and women skaters perform the same sport, some moves are symbolically female; for instance, “The most obvious is the forward layback spin: back arched, eyes closed, mouth slightly open, arms extended as for an embrace; it looks like nothing so much as popular conceptions of female sexual climax” (Feder 1994). Male skaters, in contrast, are asked to highlight their masculine prowess. If both men and women participate in a “soft culture” artistic performance such as figure skating, the spectacle must reaffirm their gender identities; male figure skaters’ virility and strength is emphasized, and women are the recipients of this virility.

For Evgeni Plushenko, it appears to be particularly vital to create a niche as a masculine hero to represent Russia. Plushenko is notable amongst Russian athletes for being a particularly well-established celebrity. Characterizations of Plushenko draw attention to a fault line within men’s figure skating; it involves the assessment of the male body in performance. Coach Alexei Mishin said of Plushenko: “He radiates power. He radiates a sense of beauty” (Longman 2014). Plushenko is reported to have once said, “You can’t be considered a true men’s champion without a quad” (Hodge 2011). There are more articles specifically about him than about any other athlete. Writing about Plushenko seems to elevate him to romantic, near-mythological status. A *Novaya Gazeta* article titled “The country chooses itself a hero” praised his “nobility of character and will” and said the Plushenko “bigger and broader than what he was doing, that is, figure skating.... [Plushenko] has long been a sport above conventions and moved to the absolute dimension, where the circle of ice is not a barrier, and myrtle grows. He has

been skating atop a snowy mountain named Olympus.”<sup>21</sup> Plushenko, this article suggests, transcends the conventions of figure skating. The tone NTV coverage after Plushenko withdrew from competition seems to defend him. An article title “Coach Tamara Moskvina: Plushenko is Punishing Himself, and Not Russia” quoted the coach as saying: “Plushenko did not deprive Russia of any sort of quota or place.”<sup>23</sup> While apparently claiming to separate Plushenko’s retirement from its implications for the Russian performance at the Olympics overall, this article assumes that most people believe Plushenko owes something to Russia.

Coverage of Yulia Lupitskaya at the Olympics continuously emphasize that she is, first and foremost, a particularly gifted child. As a fifteen-year-old schoolgirl, she is depicted entirely differently than the thirty-one year old man, Plushenko. She is universally described as studious, hard working, and serious. Novaya Gazeta reported that she admitted to crying after falling during her long program.<sup>24</sup> An NTV article reported that an artist who typically paints upbeat pop-art images of Putin painted Lupitskaya, in order to “glorify[y] the first triumph of the games.”<sup>25</sup> The article, accompanied by a screen shot of the NTV channel scrawled with the news-line “together with the president,” described how Putin called her “*umnitsa*” [little smart one]. Lupitskaya’s personal characterization is linked to her family background and home.

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<sup>23</sup> “Trener Tamara Moskvina: Plushenko nakazal sebya, a ne Rossiyu.” *Olimpiada v Sochi // NTV.Ru*. 14 Feb. 2014. Web. 7 Feb. 2014.

<sup>24</sup> “Lipnitskaya ‘mnogo rydala’ posle padeniya v proizvolnoy programme” *Novaya Gazeta*. 21 Feb. 2014. Web. 7 Apr. 2014.

<sup>25</sup> “Genialnoye vystupleniye Lipnitskoy vdokhnovilo na kholst mastera pop-arta.” *Olimpiada v Sochi // NTV.Ru*. 18 Feb. 2014. Web. 8 Apr. 2014.



NTV also mentioned that Yulia had thanked her home city, Yekaterinburg, for its support. Lupitskaya's sacrifices are described alongside her parents'.

Depiction of other skating successes was made in largely upbeat terms. A single *Novaya Gazeta* article casts the only shred of doubt, noting that 1,300,000 "foreigners" signed a petition for Adelina Sotnikova's medal to be reevaluated.<sup>26</sup> *Novaya Gazeta* depicted Sotnikova's performance as possessing both power, and suitably female characteristics: "four minutes of good, graceful, feminine, artistic, but at the same time powerful and convincing performance."<sup>27</sup> *Sport.ru* referred to Maxim Trankov and Tatiana Volosozhar's success as a "Cinderella story for two," placing the pair within a typically feminine gendered context.<sup>28</sup> This article also placed them within the larger Russian historical context, praising them for bringing Russia its first gold in pairs skating in 78 years. Such individuals, these articles posit, bring honor to the entire Russian nation; their success is not merely a personal "Cinderella story," but instead highlights the entire Russian potential for rebirth.

#### 4.3 *Alternative Narratives of the Games*

During the Sochi Olympic Games, the Russian state worked to create a carefully crafted image of its nation. However, several cases emerged which evaded official control. Errors and imperfections at the Games went viral across the Internet, with

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<sup>26</sup> "Podpisanty petsitsii na saitye Change.org trebuyut peresmotra pobedy Sotnikovoy." *Novaya Gazeta*. 21 Feb. 2014. Web. 7 Apr. 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Uspenski, Andrei. "Zoloto kakoye!" *Novaya Gazeta*. 22 Feb. 2014. Web. 7 Apr. 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Petrukhina, Anastasiya. "Figurnoye kataniye. Nikto ne khotel ustupat." *Sport.ru*. 14 Feb. 2014. Web. 7 Feb. 2014.

particular attention to the failure of the fifth Olympic ring to light properly during the Opening Ceremony. In a more serious vein, homophobic Russian legislation met international protest, including calls for states to boycott the Sochi Games. Nevertheless, the majority of this mockery and criticism specifically directed at the Olympics was confined to non-Russian sources. Russian news coverage even edited the portion of the ceremony in which the ring failed. At the same time, two topics emerged from within Russia that contradicted official narratives of the Games: Pussy Riot and environmental issues. Although Pussy Riot received more attention from international than domestic media and audiences, their protest at the Game represents an attempt by Russian citizens to redirect the national gaze. Alternatively, the Sochi planners' attempt to create an environmentally friendly image of the Games despite wide criticism by scientists illustrates an elaborate attempt to reconstruct reality in favor of the official message.

#### 4.3.1 *Pussy Riot at the Sochi Olympics*

As opposed to the carefully planned official events, the Pussy Riot protest offers a glimpse at the behavior of the state and the media when encountering a rogue, unplanned episode during the Games. The protest-punk group Pussy Riot was among the factions that worked to counter the narrative constructed by officials during the Sochi Olympics. In brightly colored balaclavas and dresses, Pussy Riot members strove to embody of the faceless Russian masses, performing a Russian nation of their own imagining: "Pussy Riot does not want the focus of attention on girls' appearances, but creates characters who express ideas" (Pussy Riot 2013: 39). Unlike the rest of the Games, which used

Russian bodies to represent state approved values, Pussy Riot used the female body to create anarchic imagery. Pussy Riot has received a majority of its support from Western Media and audience, while they are rejected or unknown by a majority of Russians. Their actions operate in defiance to the official narrative; unlike the Olympics, which attempt to placate and entertain their audiences, Pussy Riot does not court public approval. This all-female group reclaims the language of visual femininity. Although they emphasize their femininity by wearing brightly colored dresses, they seize the ideological imperative; they do not reinforce tradition, but redefine it in the name of feminism in progressive values. The members of Pussy Riot voiced their opposition to the official forces represented by the Sochi Olympics through interviews, protests, and the release of a music video. During the Games, Cossack nationalist militia horsewhipped Pussy Riot members who were attempting to perform a song. Reportedly, police and security forces detained several Pussy Riot members. In stark contrast to the Olympics, Pussy Riot's demonstrations are unpolished and stylistically simplistic, but openly and aggressively ideological.

Pussy Riot largely relies upon a guerilla form of political statement. Their formula for attracting attention relies on three elements: politically charged "feminist punk" rock; masked female silhouettes; and dramatic politically important locations. Their protests include a performance on Red Square, singing a song called "Putin Got Scared," and on a prison roof, titled "Death to Prison, Freedom to Protest." Their most controversial protest took place on the altar of Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow. Donning short, brightly colored dresses and balaclavas, they performed what they called a "punk prayer:" titled "Virgin Mary, Put Putin Away." When several of the women were arrested

and tried for hooliganism, they drew the attention of the international press. As images and reports of their protest and trial spread, the prosecuted Pussy Riot members became symbols of defiance in the face of the injustices of Putin's regime. According to defense attorney Violetta Volkov's closing statements, the defendants' rights had been repeatedly violated; she described their limited access to trial materials and the inhumane treatment they received while imprisoned (Pussy Riot 2013). The remaining imprisoned members were eventually freed in Putin's sweeping swathe of amnesties in the months preceding the Olympics.

Several of Pussy Riot's members demonstrated within Sochi itself during the Games, in defiance of bans on demonstrations. Tolokonnikova swore Sochi officials had closely followed the members' movements since arriving in Sochi, and detained them three times (Herszenhorn 18 Feb. 2014). It was later announced that the state fined the Cossack who had led the attack. Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Kozak claimed that although the women had come to Sochi to "incite conflict," the Cossack had been held responsible for beating them (Pussy Riot assailant 'held accountable': 26 Feb. 2014).

Pussy Riot's activism presents an alternative narrative to the Games. Like in the Cathedral protest, Pussy Riot juxtaposed the image of a small group of independent citizens with official power: "The Pussy Riot case is showing how three people who are charged with disorderly conduct can give birth to a movement... These private problems have become a truly political matter" (Pussy Riot 2013: 23). In public statements and demonstrations, Pussy Riot denounced the Sochi Olympic Games as a symbol of President Putin's continued power. One of the most prominent members, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, called for other countries to take a stand and refuse to attend the Games:

“They just put on another show before the Olympics...In general, I am calling for a boycott. I am calling for honesty” (23 Dec. 2013). In a New York Times article, Maria Alyokhina denounced those who proclaim the Olympics apolitical, arguing that state interests are indivisible from the country’s hosting of the games: “Those who are writing about the Olympics and who are currently present at the Games should not fall into this forgetfulness, because it is fatal. When you talk about the Olympics — whether you like it or not — you are talking about Russia” (23 Dec. 2013).

Pussy Riot repurposes the imagery of the Russian nation, repurposing the image of the Russian woman for guerilla art. Their values are inherently anti-establishment; they denounce values such as patriarchy, inequality, capitalism, religion and traditional morality. The song they debuted in Sochi, “Putin will Teach You How to Love the Motherland,” stands in direct defiance of the unified image of state and nationhood projected by the Games. The song juxtaposes images of Russia such as the matrioshka, vodka, and caviar, with their own symbols of the nation: prison, surveillance, and State TV (Pussy Riot 25 Feb. 2014). In defending their protest in the cathedral, they argued that the true profanity was the state’s utilization of the Church to legitimize itself: “It makes us sick to see such beautiful ideas forced to their knees” (Pussy Riot 2013: 102). They call attention to controversial official actions, such as the closing of the independent radio station Dozhd [Rain], and the imprisonment of environmental activist Yevgeny Vitishko. Rather than feign polish, Pussy Riot deliberately courts a hardscrabble image; under the constant threat of being swept away by security, their screamed music and garish costumes have a clear homemade quality. They encourage their message’s

dissemination not by State Television, but via YouTube. They live-tweeted being packed into a police van, even uploading photographs of each other behind bars.

Reporting on Pussy Riot's activities at the Olympics in Russian publications is predictably varied. Sport.ru made no mention of the demonstrations, exclusively reporting on sports. Novaya Gazeta noted that the state had never announced how much the Cossack who had conducted the beating had been fined.<sup>29</sup> In this article, titled "This, in trousers, is all possible?" questioned whether the employment of Cossacks helps lead to human rights violations. NTV coverage came from a completely different perspective; it noted that despite the women's claims, the police had actually been "quite friendly."<sup>30</sup> In another article, NTV noted that two Pussy Riot members had been held for questioning along with other hotel guests in connection to a robbery in their hotel.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4.3.2 *Environmental Impact of the Games*

For the past fourteen years, environmental responsibility has become an important component of the Olympic mystique. Countries claim to host the "greenest" Olympics, with the smallest environmental impact, or even to positively benefit the environment of the Games' hosts (Book 2013). Nevertheless, the scale of the Games ensures that the task of environmental protection is extremely daunting. Countries continuously choose to

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<sup>29</sup> Masyuk, Elena. "Eto, v sharovarakh, vsye mozno?" *Novaya Gazeta*. 25 Feb. 2014. Web. 26 Feb. 2014.

<sup>30</sup> "Kazaka, otshlelavsevo pevits iz Pussy Riot, nakazali rublem." *Olimpiada v Sochi // NTV*. 20 Feb. 2014. Web. 26 Feb. 2014.

<sup>31</sup> "Tolokonikovu i Alyokhinu zaderzhali po podozreniyu v krazhe." *NTV*. 18 Feb. 2014: Web. 26 Feb. 2014.

sacrifice their responsibilities to protect their own natural environment in order to conduct impressive Olympic Games. Regardless, as hosting nations seek to prove their nation's modernity and capabilities, demonstrating their environmental friendliness, dialogue about environmental conservation and improvement has become standard practice in efforts to promote the Games. According to Karin Book, efforts during the Olympics to market places as desirable locations for tourism and investment are complicated by rampant environmental abuses (2013). Olympic host cities are typically portrayed as idyllic, with incredible natural beauty. Yet appreciation for this beauty must be tempered by the knowledge of the gap between the vision of nature that appears on television and reality. In the months leading up to the Sochi Games, official channels promoted a narrative Russia's dedication to preserving the environment, while also damaging the landscape they claimed to protect. For the groups promoting the Olympics, actual environmental protection was less important than substantiating claims about Russian progressiveness, and creating a striking display for their audience. Creating memories of an impressive spectacle is more important than preserving the environment.

The 2000 Sydney Games, the first Olympics that declared its interest in to environmental conservation, were also the first to draw attention to the Game's inbuilt detriment to the environment of the Games' locations. Prior to these Games, the Olympics had long been viewed as opportunities to invest in improving local areas. The 1964 Tokyo Games and the 1988 Seoul Games provided the impetus for reducing levels of pollution and improving the handling of water (Chalkley & Essex 1999: 299). Efforts to preserve the environment, however, have faltered due to the realities of orchestrating a mega-event. Despite Sydney's claims of environmental conscientiousness, concentrated

on limiting pollution and the wasting of limited resources, Sydney faltered when it came to accepting the CO2 bans recommended by the United Nations (Chalkley & Essex 1999). Environmentalists also took issue with the quality of the cleanup efforts at Homebush Bay, the creation of dioxin waste, and the enlargement of the airport, ultimately questioning “whether flying thousands of people to one of the world’s most geographically remote cities can ever be legitimately described as a ‘green’ activity” (Chalkley & Essex 1999: 307).

The Sochi Games were highly detrimental to the environment in which they took place. This toll, in part, is due to their specific location; they were the first Winter Olympics to take place in a subtropical zone, and were planned on top of a swamp. The Winter Games notoriously are more detrimental to the environment than the Summer Games, but the impact of the 2014 Sochi Games was exacerbated by the need to construct entirely new infrastructure (Ortunh and Zhemukov 2013: 29) The Imeretinskaya Lowland, which had been largely agricultural land and wetlands and was highly biodiverse, was made into a construction site, and the riverbed of the Mzymta River was turned into a highway (Koerkamp 21 Feb. 2014). According to Karin Book, some of the Sochi venues were built within the UNESCO-protected Caucasian Biosphere Reserve and Sochi National Park (2013: 43). The interest of the Olympic venues was deemed to take precedence over these concerns. Major events like the Olympics seem to justify damage to the environment:

The experience of environmental groups in the preparations for the Sochi Olympics confirms the expectation that an alliance of state and corporation interests can use a mega-event to propel their pro-development interests while minimizing the extent of public input. (Ortunh and Zhemukov 2013: 32).



Public interest, dedication and enthusiasm for the Olympics enables the state to make unilateral decisions.

The struggle of environmental activists to raise criticism of official environmental policy surrounding the Sochi Games revealed the obstacles preventing non-governmental actors from influencing the government's actions and altering public dialogue about the Games. Among other things, environmental activists criticized "distortion and exploitation of valuable natural areas and wildlife; the building of oversized and after the Games unnecessary structures and venues; the huge flows of transportation vehicles emitting carbon dioxide during the Games; etc" (Book 2013: 49). Before the IOC accepted Sochi's proposal, 47 Russian environmental groups united in requesting the application be rejected in light of the high ecological impact (Ortunh and Zhemukov 2013: 29). The Russian power structure gives the state an advantage over civil society organizations. Not only does the state have ample fiscal and organizational resources, but it can choose to arrest or harass activists, coerce groups, or, in some cases, make certain concessions (Ortunh and Zhemukov 2013: 27). Civil society groups must work outside official organizations, holding protests and disseminating information at the street level.

Official Russian environmentalism during the Sochi Games was confined by its subordination to the cause of the spectacle. Deference to environmental causes played less of a role than symbolic language and gestures invoking the cause. The official "In Harmony with Nature" portion of the sochi.ru Olympics' website advertises the ways the Sochi 2014 games were dedicated to the preservation of the environment. The Games had originally claimed to aim to be carbon neutral, and set aside \$1.75 billion to this purpose (Ketting). Sochi.ru outlined the Sochi 2014 goals according to four "strategic directions,

namely: “Games in Harmony with Nature; Games with Minimal Impact on Climate; Zero Waste Games; Enlightenment Games.” The site emphasizes numerical accomplishments, such as the planting of 1.5 million saplings and the release of 3 million fish into the rivers. The site also introduced a sort of mascot of the Olympics’ environmentalism: the Caucasian snow leopard. The Games proposed to initiate a program of reintroducing the leopard to the Caucasus, where it has gone extinct in the wild. The snow leopard provides the perfect symbol of environmentalism, because it is an attractive innocent victim, and native to the land. The leopard was also made an official mascot of the Games.

Environmental conservation, a relatively modern idea, was incorporated into the narration of the Russian identity; progressive ideas, this framing suggests, come naturally to the Russian nation.

## CONCLUSION

While it is unfeasible to fully understand Putin's motivations, the Olympics are the product of a particular Russian political climate, which constructs Russian national success as being derivative of the state's action. These Games reflected both the unique contemporary moment, and a glimpse into the enduring and ongoing construction of identity. The Russian state seized the opportunity to focus the attention of its country and the world on the state's particular vision of the Russian nation. The spectrum of media organizations framed the Games in different ways, constructing a complex collective memory of the Games. The image of the Games developed by the media was not merely the repetition of official narratives; while NTV and Sport.ru by and large supported a narrative of a complete success, Novaya Gazeta's portrayal was more nuanced. However, much of the reporting was relatively homogenous. Reporters universally rejoiced with Adelina Sotnikova, mourned the men's hockey defeats, and voiced awe at the opening and closing ceremony. More diverse media coverage may have been limited by state ownership and self-censorship, but was also tempered by love of the homeland and the joy of spectacle and sport. Russia was shown to be a modern nation with a legacy of greatness: under the continued guidance of President Vladimir Putin, the Games suggested, Russia will continue to be a strong, modern nation. At great fiscal expense, the Russian government constructed a piece of history.

After the conclusion of the Olympics, Russians' pride after achieving a record-breaking number of medals was almost tangible. The Russian audience may well remember Russia's success in showcasing its abilities to the world. Yet while the Games stoked Russian nationalism, it remains to be seen whether the Games will benefit Russia

in the long run, or merely have perpetuated negative aspects of state control that use national pride to excuse prioritizing the government's need to maintain control at the expense of the needs of the people. Those who claim that the Games were President Vladimir Putin's way of preparing the political climate for invading Ukraine note that the Sochi Olympics coincided with escalating Russian military action in Ukraine. Although it is difficult to directly link the Olympics to the events in Ukraine, both acts reflect a single philosophy: the Russian nation must remain strong and defend its own by standing behind the state. Despite the media's depiction of individual Russians' accomplishments, the Olympics were not made possible by private individuals, but by the state's investment.

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